

10420

A MUMMER'S WIFE

WORKS BY GEORGE MOORE

ILLUS SEYMOUR AND SOUL WOMAN

A MUMMER'S WIFE

MUNLIN

SPRING DAYS

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

ESTHER WATER

ESTHER WATER (PLAY)

CELIBATES

IVELYN INNETS

SISTER TERESA

MODERN PAINTING

CONVERSATIONS IN LEBURY STREET

IMPRESSIONS AND OPINIONS

THE LAKE

THE STRIKE AT ARLINGTON

MEMOIRS OF MY DEAD LIFE

HAIL AND FAREWELL

I

II

III

AVE

SALVE

VALE

THE BROOK KERITH

A TOBY-TELLER'S HOLIDAY

AVOWALS

THE COMING OF GABRIELLE (PLAY)

HELOISE AND ABELARD

THE APOSTLE (PLAY)

PURE POETRY (ANTHOLOGY)

DAPHNIS AND CHLOE

ELICK BERACHA

THE MAKING OF AN IMMORTAL (PLAY)

A MUMMER'S WIFE

GEORGE MOORE



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.

First published - April, 1918
New Impression, September, 1929

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESHER

A DEDICATION TO ROBERT ROSS

1

IN the sunset of his life a man often finds himself unable to put dates even upon events in which his sympathies were, and perhaps are still, engaged; all things seem to have befallen yesterday, and yet it cannot be less than three years since we were anxious to testify to our belief in the kindness and justice with which you had fulfilled your double duties in the *Morning Post* towards us and the proprietors of the paper.

A committee sprang up quickly, and a letter was addressed by it to all the notable workers in the arts and to all those who were known to be interested in the arts, and very soon a considerable sum of money was collected; but when the committee met to decide what form the commemorative gift should take, a perplexity arose, many being inclined towards a piece of plate. It was pointed out that a piece of plate worth eight hundred pounds would prove a cumbersome piece of furniture—a white elephant, in fact—in the small house or apartment or flat in which a critic usually lives. The truth of this could not be gainsaid. Other suggestions were forthcoming for your benefit, every one obtaining a certain amount of support, but none commanding a majority of votes; and the perplexity continued till it was mooted that the disposal of the money should be

left to your option, and in view of the fact that you had filled the post of art critic for many years, you decided to found a Slade scholarship. It seemed to you well that a young man on leaving the Slade School should be provided with a sum of money sufficient to furnish a studio, and some seven or eight hundred pounds were invested, the remainder being spent on a trinket for your person to wear—a watch. I have not forgotten that I was one of the dissidents, scholarships not appealing to me, but lately I have begun to see that you were wise in the disposal of the money. A watch was enough for remembrance, and since I caught sight of it just now, the pleasant thoughts it has evoked console me for your departure: after bidding you good-bye on the doorstep, I return to my fireside to chew the cud once again of the temperate and tolerant articles that I used to read years ago in the *Morning Post*.

You see, Ross, I was critic myself for some years on the *Speaker*, but my articles were often bitter and explosive; I was prone to polemics and lacked the finer sense that enabled you to pass over works with which you were not in sympathy, and without wounding the painter. My intention was often to wound him in the absurd hope that I might compel him to do better. My motto seems to have been 'Compel them to come in'—words used by Jesus in one of his parables, and relied on by ecclesiastics as a justification of persecution, and by many amongst us whose names I will not pillory here, for I have chosen that these pages shall be about you and nothing but you. If I speak of myself in a forgotten crusade, it is to place you in your true light. We recognized

A DEDICATION TO ROBERT ROSS vii

your critical insight and your literary skill, but it was not for these qualities that we, the criticized, decided to present you, the critic, with a token of our gratitude; nor was it because you had praised our works (a great number of the subscribers had not received praise from you): we were moved altogether, I think, by the consciousness that you had in a difficult task proved yourself to be a kindly critic, and yet a just one, and it was for these qualities that you received an honour, that is unique, I think, in the chronicle of criticism.

II

Memory pulls me up, and out of some moments of doubt, the suspicion emerges that all I am writing here was read by me somewhere: but it was not in our original declaration of faith, for I never saw it, not having attended the presentation of the testimonial. Where, then? In the newspapers that quoted from the original document? Written out by whom? By Witt or by MacColl, excellent writers both? But being a writer myself, I am called upon to do my own writing. . . . Newspapers are transitory things—a good reason for writing out the story afresh; and there is still another reason for writing it out—my reasons for dedicating this book to you. We must have reasons always, else we pass for unreasonable beings, and a better reason for dedicating a book to you than mine, I am fain to believe, will never be found by anybody in search of a reason for his actions. My name is among the signatories to the document that I have called ‘our declaration of faith’; and having committed myself

viii A DEDICATION TO ROBERT ROSS

thus fully to your critical judgment, it seems to me that for the completion of the harmony a dedication is necessary. A fair share of reasons I am setting forth for this act of mine, every one of them valid, and the most valid of all my reason for choosing this book, *A Mummer's Wife*, to dedicate to you, is your own commendation of it the other night when you said to me that no book of mine in your opinion was more likely to 'live'! To live for five-and-twenty years is as long an immortality as anyone should set his heart on; for who would wish to be chattered about by the people that will live in these islands three hundred years hence? We should not understand them nor they us. Avaunt, therefore, all legendary immortalities, and let us be content, Ross, to be remembered by our friends, and, perhaps, to have our names passed on by disciples to another generation! A fair and natural immortality this is; let us share it together. Our bark lies in the harbour: you tell me the spars are sound, and the seams have been caulked; the bark, you say, is seaworthy and will outlive any of the little storms that she may meet on the voyage—a better craft is not to be found in my little fleet. You said yesterevening across the hearthrug, '*Esther Waters* speaks out of a deeper appreciation of life;' but you added: 'In *A Mummer's Wife* there is a youthful imagination and a young man's exuberance on coming into his own for the first time, and this is a quality——' No doubt it is a quality, Ross; but what kind of quality? You did not finish your sentence, or I have forgotten it. Let me finish it for you—'that outweighs all other qualities' But does it? I am interpreting you

A DEDICATION TO ROBERT ROSS ix

badly. You would not commit yourself to so crude an opinion, and I am prepared to believe that I did not catch the words as they fell from your lips. All I can recall for certain of the pleasant moment when you were considering which of my works you liked the best are stray words that may be arranged here into a sentence which, though it does not represent your critical judgments accurately, may be accepted by you. You said your thoughts went more frequently to *A Mummer's Wife* than to *Esther Waters*; and I am almost sure something was said about the earlier book being a more spontaneous issue of the imagination, and that the wandering life of the mummers gives an old-world, adventurous air to the book, reminding you of *The Golden Ass*—a book I read last year, and found in it so many remembrances of myself that I fell to thinking it was a book I might have written had I lived two thousand years ago. Who can say he has not lived before, and is it not as important to believe we lived herebefore as it is to believe we are going to live hereafter? If I had lived herebefore, Jupiter knows what I should have written, but it would not have been *Esther Waters*: more likely a book like *A Mummer's Wife*—a band of jugglers and acrobats travelling from town to town. As I write these lines an antique story rises up in my mind, a recollection of one of my lost works or an instantaneous reading of Apuleius into *A Mummer's Wife*—which?

G M

A MUMMER'S WIFE

I

IN default of a screen, a gown and a red petticoat had been thrown over a clothes-horse, and these shaded the glare of the lamp from the eyes of the sick man. In the pale obscurity of the room, his bearded cheeks could be seen buried in a heap of tossed pillows. By his bedside sat a young woman. As she dozed, her face drooped until her features were hidden, and the lamp-light made the curious curves of a beautiful ear look like a piece of illuminated porcelain. Her hands lay upon her lap, her needlework slipped from them; and as it fell to the ground she awoke.

She pressed her hands against her forehead and made an effort to rouse herself. As she did so, her face contracted with an expression of disgust, and she remembered the ether. The soft, vaporous odour drifted towards her from a small table strewn with medicine bottles, and taking care to hold the cork tightly in her fingers she squeezed it into the bottle.

At that moment the clock struck eleven and the clear tones of its bell broke the silence sharply; the patient moaned as if in reply, and his thin hairy arms

stirred feverishly on the wide patchwork counterpane. She took them in her hands and covered them over; she tried to arrange the pillows more comfortably, but as she did so he turned and tossed impatiently, and, fearing to disturb him, she put back the handkerchief she had taken from the pillow to wipe the sweat from his brow, and regaining her chair, with a weary movement she picked up the cloth that had fallen from her knees and slowly continued her work.

It was a piece of patchwork like the counterpane on the bed; the squares of a chessboard had been taken as a design, and, selecting a fragment of stuff, she trimmed it into the required shape and sewed it into its allotted corner.

Nothing was now heard but the methodical click of her needle as it struck the head of her thimble, and then the long swish of the thread as she drew it through the cloth. The lamp at her elbow burned steadily, and the glare glanced along her arm as she raised it with the large movement of sewing.

Her hair was blue wherever the light touched it, and it encircled the white prominent temple like a piece of rich black velvet; a dark shadow defined the delicate nose, and hinted at thin indecision of lips, whilst a broad touch of white marked the weak but not unbeautiful chin.

On the corner of the table lay a book, a well-worn volume in a faded red paper cover. It was a novel she used to read with delight when she was a girl, but it had somehow failed to interest her, and after a few pages she had laid it aside, preferring for distraction her accustomed sewing. She was now well

awake, and, as she worked, her thoughts turned on things concerning the daily routine of her life. She thought of the time when her husband would be well ; of the pillow she was making ; of how nice it would look in the green armchair ; of the much greater likelihood of letting their rooms if they were better furnished ; of their new lodger ; and of the probability of a quarrel between him and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Ede.

For more than a week past the new lodger had formed the staple subject of conversation in this household. Mrs. Ede, Kate's mother-in-law, was loud in her protestations that the harbouring of an actor could not but be attended by bad luck. Kate felt a little uneasy ; her puritanism was of a less marked kind ; perhaps at first she had felt inclined to agree with her mother-in-law, but her husband had shown himself so stubborn, and had so persistently declared that he was not going to keep his rooms empty any longer, that for peace' sake she was fain to side with him. The question arose in a very unexpected way. During the whole winter they were unfortunate with their rooms, though they made many attempts to get lodgers ; they even advertised. Some few people asked to see the rooms ; but they merely made an offer. One day a man who came into the shop to buy some paper collars asked Kate if she had any apartments to let. She answered yes, and they went upstairs. After a cursory inspection he told her that he was the agent in advance to a travelling opera company, and that if she liked he would recommend her rooms to the stage manager, a particular friend of his. The proposition was

somewhat startling, but, not liking to say no, she proposed to refer the matter to her husband.

At that particular moment Ede happened to be engaged in a violent dispute with his mother, and so angry was he that when Mrs. Ede raised her hands to protest against the introduction of an actor into the household, he straightway told her that 'if she didn't like it she might do the other thing.' Nothing more was said at the time; the old lady retired in indignation, and Mr. Lennox was written to. Kate sympathized alternately with both sides. Mrs. Ede was sturdy in defence of her principles; Ede was petulant and abusive; and between the two Kate was blown about like a feather in a storm. Daily the argument waxed warmer, until one night, in the middle of a scene characterized by much Biblical quotation, Ede declared he could stand it no longer, and rushed out of the house. In vain the women tried to stop him, knowing well what the consequences would be. A draught, a slight exposure, sufficed to give him a cold, and with him a cold always ended in an asthmatic attack. And these were often so violent as to lay him up for weeks at a time. When he returned, his temper grown cooler under the influence of the night air, he was coughing, and the next night found him breathless. His anger had at first vented itself against his mother, whom he refused to see, and thus the whole labour of nursing him was thrown on Kate. She didn't grumble at this, but it was terrible to have to listen to him.

It was Mr. Lennox, and nothing but Mr. Lennox. All the pauses in the suffocation were utilized to

• speak on this important question, and even now Kate, who had not yet perceived that the short respite which getting rid of the phlegm had given him was coming to an end, expected him to say something concerning the still unknown person. But Ede did not speak, and, to put herself as it were out of suspense, she referred to some previous conversation :

‘I’m sure you’re right ; the only people in the town who let their rooms are those who have a theatrical connection.’

‘Oh, I don’t care ; I’m going to have a bad night,’ said Mr. Ede, who now thought only of how he should get his next breath.

‘But you seemed to be getting better,’ she replied hurriedly.

‘No ! I feel it coming on—I’m suffocating. Have you got the ether?’

• Kate did not answer, but made a rapid movement towards the table, and snatching the bottle she uncorked it. The sickly odour quietly spread like oil over the close atmosphere of the room, but, mastering her repugnance, she held it to him, and in the hope of obtaining relief he inhaled it greedily. • But the remedy proved of no avail, and he pushed the bottle away.

‘Oh, these headaches ! My head is splitting,’ he said, after a deep inspiration which seemed as if it would cost him his life. ‘Nothing seems to do me any good. Have you got any cigarettes?’

• ‘I’m sorry, they haven’t arrived yet.’ I wrote for them,’ she replied, hesitating ; ‘but don’t you think——?’

He shook his head, and, resenting Kate's assiduities, with trembling fingers he unfastened the shawl she had placed on his shoulders, and then, planting his elbows on his knees, with a fixed head and elevated shoulders, he gave himself up to the struggle of taking breath. . . . At that moment she would have laid down her life to save him from the least of his pains, but she could only sit by him watching the struggle, knowing that nothing could be done to relieve him. She had seen the same scene repeated a hundred times before, but it never seemed to lose any of its terror. In the first month of their marriage she had been frightened by one of these asthmatic attacks. It had come on in the middle of the night, and she remembered well how she had prayed to God that it should not be her fate to see her husband die before her eyes. She knew now that death was not to be apprehended—the paroxysm would wear itself out—but she knew also of the horrors that would have to be endured before the time of relief came. She could count them upon her fingers—she could see it all as in a vision—a nightmare that would drag out its long changes until the dawn began to break; she anticipated the hours of the night.

‘Air! Air! I’m suff-o-cating!’ he sobbed out with a desperate effort.

Kate ran to the window and threw it open. The paroxysm had reached its height, and, resting his elbows well on his knees, he gasped many times, but before the inspiration was complete his strength failed him. No want but that of breath could have forced him to try again; and the second effort was even

more terrible than the first. A great upheaval, a great wrenching and rocking seemed to be going on within him; the veins on his forehead were distended, the muscles of his chest laboured, and it seemed as if every minute were going to be his last. But with a supreme effort he managed to catch breath, and then there was a moment of respite, and Kate could see that he was thinking of the next struggle, for he breathed avariciously, letting the air that had cost him so much agony pass slowly through his lips. To breathe again he would have to get on to his feet, which he did, and so engrossed was he in the labour of breathing that he pushed the paraffin lamp roughly; it would have fallen had Kate not been there to catch it. She besought of him to say what he wanted, but he made no reply, and continued to drag himself from one piece of furniture to another, till at last, grasping the back of a chair, he breathed by jerks, each inspiration being accompanied by a violent spasmodic wrench, violent enough to break open his chest. She watched, expecting every moment to see him roll over, a corpse, but knowing from past experiences that he would recover somehow. His recoveries always seemed to her like miracles, and she watched the long pallid face crushed under a shock of dark matted hair, a dirty nightshirt, a pair of thin legs; but for the moment the grandeur of human suffering covered him, lifting him beyond the pale of loving or loathing, investing and clothing him in the pity of tragic things. The room, too, seemed transfigured. The bare wide floor, the gaunt bed, the poor walls plastered with religious prints cut from journals, even the ordinary furniture of every-

day use—the little washhandstand with the common delf ewer, the chest of drawers that might have been bought for thirty shillings - lost their coarseness; their triviality disappeared, until nothing was seen or felt but this one suffering man.

The minutes slipped like the iron teeth of a saw over Kate's sensibilities. A hundred times she had run over in her mind the list of remedies she had seen him use. They were few in number, and none of any real service except the cigarettes which she had not. She asked him to allow her to try iodine, but he could not or would not make her any answer. It was cruel to see him struggling, but he resisted assistance, and watching like one in a dream, frightened at her own powerlessness to save or avert, Kate remained crouching by the fireplace without strength to think or act, until she was suddenly awakened by seeing him relax his hold and slip heavily on the floor; and it was only by putting forth her whole strength she could get him into a sitting position; when she attempted to place him in a chair he slipped through her arms. There was, therefore, nothing to do but to shriek for help, and hope to awaken her mother-in-law. The echoes rang through the house, and as they died away, appalled, she listened to the silence.

At length it grew clear that Mrs. Ede could not be awakened, and Kate saw that she would have to trust to herself alone, and after two or three failures she applied herself to winning him back to consciousness. It was necessary to do so before attempting to move him again, and, sprinkling his face with water, she persuaded him to open his eyes, and after

one little stare he slipped back into the nothingness he had come out of; and this was repeated several times, Kate redoubling her efforts until at last she succeeded in placing him in a chair. He sat there, still striving and struggling with his breath, unable to move, and soaked with sweat, but getting better every minute. The worst of the attack was now over; she buttoned his nightshirt across his panting chest and covered his shoulders with his red shawl once more, and with a sentiment of real tenderness she took his hand in hers. She looked at him, feeling her heart grow larger.

He was her husband; he had suffered terribly, and was now getting better; and she was his wife, whose duty it was to attend him. She only wished he would allow her to love him a little better; but against her will facts pierced through this luminous mist of sentiment, and she could not help remembering how petulant he was with her, how utterly all her wishes were disregarded. 'What a pity he's not a little different!' she thought; but when she looked at him and saw how he suffered, all other thoughts were once more drowned and swept away. She forgot how he often rendered her life miserable, wellnigh unbearable, by small vices, faults that defy definition, unending selfishness and unceasing irritability. But now all dissatisfaction and bitterness were again merged into a sentiment that was akin to love; and in this time of physical degradation he possessed her perhaps more truly, more perfectly, than even in his best moments of health.

But her life was one of work, not of musing, and

Kate remained silent, being too indignant for the moment to think of replying; but it was evident from her manner that she would not be able to contain herself much longer. He had hurt her to the quick, and her brown eyes swam with tears. His head lay back upon the built-up pillows, he fumed slowly, trying to find new matter for reproach, and breath wherewith to explain it. At last he thought of the cigarettes.

‘Even supposing that you did not remember how long you left the window open, I cannot understand how you forgot to send for the cigarettes. You know well enough that smoking is the only thing that relieves me when I’m in this state. I think it was most unfeeling—yes, most unfeeling!’ Having said so much, he leaned forward to get breath, and coughed.

‘You’d better lie still, Ralph; you’ll only make yourself bad again. Now that you feel a little easier you should try to go to sleep.’

So far she got without betraying any emotion, but as she continued to advise him her voice began to tremble, her presence of mind to forsake her, and she burst into a flood of tears.

‘I don’t know how you can treat me as you do,’ she said, sobbing hysterically. ‘I do everything—I give up my night’s rest to you, I work hard all day for you, and in return I only receive hard words. Oh, it’s no use,’ she said; ‘I can bear it no longer; you’ll have to get someone else to mind you.’

This outburst of passion came suddenly upon Mr. Ede, and for some time he was at a loss how to proceed. At last, feeling a little sorry, he resolved

to make it up, and putting out his hand to her, he said :

‘Now, don’t cry, Kate ; perhaps I was wrong in speaking so crossly. I didn’t mean all I said—it’s this horrid asthma.’

‘Oh, I can bear anything but to be told I neglect you—and when I stop up watching you three nights running——’

These little quarrels were of constant occurrence. Irritable by nature, and rendered doubly so by the character of his complaint, the invalid at times found it impossible to restrain his ill-humour ; but he was not entirely bad ; he inherited a touch of kind-heartedness from his mother, and being now moved by Kate’s tears, he said :

‘That’s quite true, and I’m sorry for what I said ; you are a good little nurse. I won’t scold you again. Make it up.’

Kate found it hard to forget merely because Ralph desired it, and for some time she refused to listen to his expostulations, and walked about the room crying, but her anger could not long resist the dead weight of sleep that was oppressing her, and eventually she came and sat down in her own place by him. The next step to reconciliation was more easy. Kate was not vindictive, although quick-tempered, and at last, amid some hysterical sobbing, peace was restored. Ralph began to speak of his asthma again, telling how he had fancied he was going to die, and when she expressed her fear and regret he hastened to assure her that no one ever died of asthma that a man might live fifty, sixty, or seventy years, suffering all the while from the com-

plaint; and he rambled on until words and ideas together failed him, and he fell asleep. With a sigh of relief Kate rose to her feet, and seeing that he was settled for the night, she turned to leave him, and passed into her room with a slow and dragging movement; but the place had a look so cold and unrestful that it pierced through even her sense of weariness, and she stood urging her tired brains to think of what she should do. At last, remembering that she could get a pillow from the room they reserved for letting, she turned to go. •

Facing their room, and only divided by the very narrowest of passages, was the stranger's apartment.

Both doors were approached by a couple of steps, which so reduced the space that were two people to meet on the landing, one would have to give way to the other. Mr. and Mrs. Ede found this proximity to their lodger, when they had one, somewhat inconvenient, but, as he said, 'One doesn't get ten shillings a week for nothing.'

Kate lingered a moment on the threshold, and then, with the hand in which she held the novel she had been reading, she picked up her skirt and stepped across the way. •

II

At first she could not determine who was passing through the twilight of the room, but as the blinds were suddenly drawn up and a flood of sunlight poured across the bed, she fell back amid the pillows, having recognized her mother-in-law in a painful moment of semi-blindness. The old woman

carried a slop-pail, which she nearly dropped, so surprised was she to find Kate in the stranger's room.

'But how did you get here?' she said hastily.

'I had to give Ralph my pillow, and when he went to sleep I came to fetch one out of the bedroom here; and then I thought I would be more comfortable here—I was too tired to go back again—I don't know how it was—what does it matter?'

Kate, who was stupefied with sleep, had answered so crossly that Mrs. Ede did not speak for some time; at last, at the end of a long silence, she said:

'Then he had a very bad night?'

'Dreadful!' returned Kate. 'I never was so frightened in my life.'

'And how did the fit come on?' asked Mrs. Ede.

'Oh, I can't tell you now,' said Kate. 'I'm so tired. I'm aching all over.'

'Well, then, I'll bring you up your breakfast. You do look tired. It will do you good to remain in bed.'

'Bring me up my breakfast! Then, what time is it?' said Kate, sitting up in bed with a start.

'What does it matter what the time is? If you're tired, lie still; I'll see that everything is right.'

'But I've promised Mrs. Barnes her dress by to-morrow night. Oh, my goodness! I shall never get it done! Do tell me what time it is.'

'Well, it's just nine,' the old woman answered apologetically; 'but Mrs. Barnes will have to wait; you can't kill yourself. It's a great shame of Ralph to have you sitting up when I could look after him just as well, and all because of the mummer.'

'Oh, don't, mother,' said Kate, who knew that Mrs. Ede could rate play-actors for a good half-hour without feeling the time passing, and taking her mother-in-law's hands in hers, she looked earnestly in her face, saying :

'You know, mother, I have a hard time of it, and I try to bear up as well as I can. You're the only one I've to help me; don't turn against me. Ralph has set his mind on having the rooms let, and the mummer, as you call him, is coming here to-day; it's all settled. Promise me you'll do nothing to unsettle it, and that while Mr. Lennox is here you'll try to make him comfortable. I've my dressmaking to attend to, and can't be always after him. Will you do this thing for me?' and after a moment or so of indecision Mrs. Ede said :

'I don't believe money made out of such people can bring luck, but since you both wish it, I suppose I must give way. But you won't be able to say I didn't warn you.'

'Yes, yes, but since we can't prevent his coming, will you promise that whilst he's here you'll attend to him just as you did to the other gentleman?'

'I shall say nothing to him, and if he doesn't make the house a disgrace, I shall be well satisfied.'

'How do you mean a disgrace?'

'Don't you know, dear, that actors have always a lot of women after them, and I for one am not going to attend on wenches like them. If I had my way I'd whip such people until I slashed all the wickedness out of them.'

'But he won't bring any women here; we won't

allow it,' said Kate, a little shocked, and she strove to think how they should put a stop to such behaviour. 'If Mr. Lennox doesn't conduct himself properly——'

'Of course I shall try to do my duty, and if Mr. Lennox respects himself I shall try to respect him.'

She spoke these words hesitatingly, but the admission that she possibly might respect Mr. Lennox satisfied Kate, and not wishing to press the matter further, she said, suddenly referring to their previous conversation :

'But didn't you say that it was nine o'clock?'

'It's more than nine now.'

'Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! how late I am! I suppose the two little girls are here?'

'They just came in as I was going upstairs; I've set them to work.'

'I wish you'd get the tea ready, and you might make some buttered toast; Ralph would like some, and so should I, for the matter of that.'

Then Ralph's voice was heard calling, and seeing what was wanted, she hastened to his assistance.

'Where were you last night?' he asked her.

'I slept in the stranger's room; I thought you'd not require me, and I was more comfortable there. The bed in the back room is all ups and downs.'

He was breathing heavily in a way that made her fear he was going to have another attack.

'Is mother in a great rage because I won't let her in?' he said presently.

'She's very much cut up about it, dear; you know she loves you better than anyone in the world. You'd do well to make it up with her.'

‘Well, perhaps I was wrong,’ he said after a time, and with good humour, ‘but she annoys me. She will interfere in everything; as if I hadn’t a right to let my rooms to whom I please. She pays for all she has here, but I’d much sooner she left us than be lorded over in that way.’

‘She doesn’t want to lord it over you, dear. It’s all arranged. She promised me just now she’d say nothing more about it, and that she’d look after Mr. Lennox like any other lodger.’

On hearing that his mother was willing to submit to his will, the invalid smiled and expressed regret that the presence of an extra person in the house, especially an actor, would give his wife and mother more work to do.

‘But I shall soon be well,’ he said, ‘and I dare say downstairs looking after the shop in a week.’

Kate protested against such imprudence, and then suggested she should go and see after his breakfast. Ralph proffered no objection, and bidding him good-bye for the present, she went downstairs. Annie was helping Mrs. Ede to make the toast in the front kitchen; Lizzie stood at the table buttering it, but as soon as Kate entered they returned to their sewing, for it was against Kate’s theories that the apprentices should assist in the household work.

‘Dear mother,’ she began, but desisted, and when all was ready Mrs. Ede, remembering she had to make peace with her son, seized the tray and went upstairs. And the moment she was gone Kate seated herself wearily on the red, calico-covered sofa. Like an elongated armchair, it looked quaint, neat, and dumpy, pushed up against the wall between the

black fireplace on the right and the little window shaded with the muslin blinds, under which a pot of greenstuff bloomed freshly. She lay back thinking vaguely, her cup of hot tea uppermost in her mind, hoping that Mrs. Ede would not keep her waiting long; and then, as her thoughts detached themselves, she remembered the actor whom they expected that afternoon. The annoyances which he had unconsciously caused her had linked him to her in a curious way, and all her prejudices vanished in the sensation of nearness that each succeeding hour magnified, and she wondered who this being was who had brought so much trouble into her life even before she had seen him. As the word 'trouble' went through her mind she paused, arrested by a passing feeling of sentimentality; but it explained nothing, defined nothing, only touched her as a breeze does a flower, and floated away. The dreamy warmth of the fire absorbed her more direct feelings, and for some moments she dozed in a haze of dim sensuousness and emotive numbness. As in a dusky glass, she saw herself a tender, loving, but unhappy woman; by her side were her querulous husband and her kindly-minded mother-in-law, and then there was a phantom she could not determine, and behind it something into which she could not see. Was it a distant country? Was it a scene of revelry? Impossible to say, for whenever she attempted to find definite shapes in the glowing colours they vanished in a blurred confusion.

But amid these fleeting visions there was one shape that particularly interested her, and she pursued it tenaciously, until in a desperate effort to

define its features she awoke with a start and spoke more crossly than she intended to the little girls, who had pulled aside the curtain and were intently examining the huge theatrical poster that adorned the corner of the lane. But as she scolded she could not help smiling; for she saw how her dream had been made out of the red and blue dresses of the picture.

The arrival of each new company in the town was announced pictorially on this corner wall, and, in the course of the year, many of the vicissitudes to which human life is liable received illustration upon it. Wrecks at sea, robberies on the highways, prisoners perishing in dungeons, green lanes and lovers, babies, glowing hearths, and heroic young husbands. The opera companies exhibited the less serious sides of life—strangely dressed people and gallants kissing their hands to ladies standing on balconies.

The little girls examined these pictures and commented on them; and on Saturdays it was a matter of the keenest speculation what the following week would bring them. Lizzie preferred exciting scenes of murder and arson, while Annie was moved more by leavetakings and declarations of unalterable affection. These differences of taste often gave rise to little bickerings, and last week there had been much prophesying as to whether the tragic or the sentimental element would prove next week's attraction. Lizzie had voted for robbers and mountains, Annie for lovers and a nice cottage. And, remembering their little dispute, Kate said:

‘Well, dears, is it a robber or a sweetheart?’

‘We’re not sure,’ exclaimed both children in a dis-

appointed tone of voice ; ' we can't make the picture out.' Then Lizzie, who cared little for uncertainties, said :

'It isn't a nice picture at all; it is all mixed up.'

'Not a nice picture at all, and all mixed up?' said Kate, smiling, yet interested in the conversation. 'And all mixed up; how is that? I must see if I can make it out myself.'

The huge poster contained some figures nearly life-size. It showed a young girl in a bridal dress and wreath struggling between two police agents, who were arresting her in a marketplace of old time, in a strangely costumed crowd, which was clamouring violently. The poor bridegroom was being held back by his friends; a handsome young man in knee-breeches and a cocked hat watched the proceedings cynically in the right-hand corner, whilst on the left a big fat man frantically endeavoured to recover his wig, that had been lost in the *mêlée*. The advertisement was headed, 'Morton and Cox's Operatic Company,' and concluded with the announcement that *Madame Angot* would be played at the Queen's Theatre. After a few moments spent in examining the picture Kate said it must have something to do with France.

'I know what it means,' cried Lizzie; 'you see that old chap on the right? He's the rich man who has sent the two policemen to carry the bride to his castle, and it's the young fellow in the corner who has betrayed them.'

The ingenuity of this explanation took Kate and Annie so much by surprise that for the moment they

could not attempt to controvert it, and remained silent, whilst Lizzie looked at them triumphantly. 'The more they examined the picture, the more clear did it appear that Lizzie was right.' At the end of a long pause Kate said :

'Anyhow, we shall soon know, for one of the actors of the company is coming here to lodge, and we'll ask him.'

'A real actor coming here to lodge?' exclaimed Annie. 'Oh, how nice that will be! And will he take us to see the play?'

'How silly of you, Annie!' said Lizzie, who, proud of her successful explanation of the poster, was little inclined to think she knew all about actors. 'How can he take us to the play? Isn't he going to act it himself? But do tell me, Mrs. Ede—is he the one in the cocked hat?'

'I hope he isn't the fat man who has lost his wig,' Annie murmured under her breath.

'I don't know which of those gentlemen is coming here. For all I know it may be the policeman,' Kate added maliciously.

'Don't say that, Mrs. Ede!' Annie exclaimed.

Kate smiled at the children's earnestness, and wishing to keep up the joke, said :

'You know, my dear, they are only sham policemen, and I dare say are very nice gentlemen in reality.'

Annie and Lizzie hung down their heads; it was evident they had no sympathies with policemen, not even with sham ones.

'But if it isn't a policeman, who would you like it to be, Lizzie?' said Kate.

‘Oh, the man in the cocked hat,’ replied Lizzie without hesitation.

‘And you, Annie?’

Annie looked puzzled, and after a moment said with a slight whimper :

‘Lizzie always takes what I want—I was just going——’

‘Oh yes, miss, we know all about that,’ returned Lizzie derisively. ‘Annie never can choose for herself ; she always tries to imitate me. She’ll have the man who’s lost his wig ! Oh yes, yes ! Isn’t it so, Mrs. Ede ? Isn’t Annie going to marry the man who’s lost his wig ?’

Tears trembled in Annie’s eyes, but as she happened at that moment to catch sight of the young man in white, she declared triumphantly that she would choose him.

‘Well done, Annie!’ said Kate, laughing as she patted the child’s curls, but her eyes fell on the neglected apron, and seeing how crookedly it was being hemmed, she said :

‘Oh, my dear, this is very bad ; you must go back, undo all you have done this morning, and get it quite straight.’

She undid some three or four inches of the sewing, and then showed the child how the hem was to be turned in, and while she did so a smile hovered round the corners of her thin lips, for she was thinking of the new lodger, asking herself which man in the picture was coming to lodge in her house.

Mrs. Ede returned, talking angrily, but Kate could only catch the words ‘waiting’ and ‘breakfast’

cold' and 'sorry.' At last, out of a confusion of words a reproof broke from her mother-in-law for not having roused her.

'I called and called,' said Kate, 'but nothing would have awakened you.'

'You should have knocked at my door,' Mrs. Ede answered, and after speaking about open house and late hours she asked Kate suddenly what was going to be done about the latchkey.

'I suppose he will have to have his latchkey,' Kate answered.

'I shall not close my eyes,' Mrs. Ede returned, 'until I hear him come into the house. He won't be bringing with him any of the women from the theatre.'

Kate assured her that she would make this part of the bargain, and somewhat softened, Mrs. Ede spoke of the danger of bad company, and trusted that having an actor in the house would not be a reason for going to the theatre and falling into idle habits.

'One would have thought that we heard enough of that theatre from Miss Hender,' she interjected, and then lapsed into silence.

Miss Hender, Kate's assistant, was one of Mrs. Ede's particular dislikes. Of her moral character Mrs. Ede had the gravest doubts; for what could be expected, she often muttered, of a person who turned up her nose when she was asked to stay and attend evening prayers, and who kept company with a stage carpenter?

Mrs. Ede did not cease talking of Hender till the girl herself came in, with many apologies for being

an hour behind her time, and saying that she really could not help it ; her sister had been very ill, and she had been obliged to sit up with her all night. Mrs. Ede smiled at this explanation, and withdrew, leaving Kate in doubt as to the truth of the excuse put forward by her assistant ; but remembering that Mrs. Barnes's dress had been promised for Tuesday morning, she said :

‘Come, we’re wasting all the morning ; we must get on with Mrs. Barnes’s dress,’ and a stout, buxom, carrotty-haired girl of twenty followed Kate upstairs, thinking of the money she might earn and of how she and the stage carpenter might spend it together. She was always full of information concerning the big red house in Queen Street. She was sure that the hours in the workroom would not seem half so long if Kate would wake up a bit, go to the play, and chat about what was going on in the town. How anyone could live with that horrid old woman always hanging about, with her religion and salvation, was beyond her. She hadn’t time for such things, and as for Bill, he said it was all ‘tommy-rot.’

Hender was an excellent workwoman, although a lazy girl, and, seeing from Kate’s manner that the time had not come for conversation, applied herself diligently to her business. Placing the two side-seams and the back under the needle, she gave the wheel a turn, and rapidly the little steel needle darted up and down into the glistening silk, as Miss Hender’s thick hands pushed it forward. The work was too delicate to admit of any distraction, so for some time nothing was heard but the clinking rattle of the machine and the ‘swishing’ of the silk

as Kate drew it across the table and snipped it with the scissors which hung from her waist.

But at the end of about half an hour the work came to a pause. Hender had finished sewing up the bodice, had tacked on the facings, and Kate had cut out the skirt and basted it together. The time had come for exchanging a few words, and lifting her head from her work, she asked her assistant if she could remain that evening and do a little overtime. Hender said she was very sorry, but it was the first night of the new opera company; she had passes for the pit, and had promised to take a friend with her. She would, therefore, have to hurry away a little before six, so as to have her tea and be dressed in time.

‘Well, I don’t know what I shall do,’ said Kate sorrowfully. ‘As for myself, I simply couldn’t pass another night out of bed. You know I was up looking after my husband all night. Attending a sick man, and one as cross as Mr. Ede, is not very nice, I can assure you.’

Hender congratulated herself inwardly that Bill was never likely to want much attendance.

‘I think you’d better tell Mrs. Barnes that she can’t expect the dress; it will be impossible to get it done in the time. I’d be delighted to help you, but I couldn’t disappoint my little friend. Besides, you’ve Mr. Lennox coming here to-day . . . you can’t get the dress done by to-morrow night!’

Hender had been waiting for a long time for an opportunity to lead up to Mr. Lennox.

‘Oh, dear me!’ said Kate, ‘I’d forgotten him, and

he'll be coming this afternoon, and may want some dinner, and I'll have to help mother.'

'They always have dinner in the afternoon,' said Miss Hender, with a feeling of pride at being able to speak authoritatively on the ways and habits of actors.

'Do they?' replied Kate reflectively; and then, suddenly remembering her promise to the little girls, she said:

'But do you know what part he takes in the play?'

Hender always looked pleased when questioned about the theatre, but all the stage carpenter had been able to tell her about the company was that it was one of the best travelling; that Frank Bret, the tenor, was supposed to have a wonderful voice; that the amount of presents he received in each town from ladies in the upper ranks of society would furnish a small shop—'It's said that they'd sell the chemises off their backs for him.' The stage carpenter had also informed her that Joe Mortimer's performance in the *Cloches* was extraordinary; he never failed to bring down the house in his big scene; and Lucy Leslie was the best Clairette going.

And now that they were going to have an actor lodging in their house, Kate felt a certain interest in hearing what such people were like; and while Miss Hender gossiped about all she had heard, Kate remembered that her question relating to Mr. Lennox remained unanswered.

'But you've not told me what part Mr. Lennox plays. Perhaps he's the man in white who is being

dragged away from his bride? I've been examining the big picture; the little girls were so curious to know what it meant.'

'Yes, he may play that part; it is called Pom-Pom Pouct—I can't pronounce it right; it's French. But in any case you'll find him fine. All theatre people are. The other day I went behind to talk to Bill, and Mr. Rickett stopped to speak to me as he was running to make a change.'

'What's that?' asked Kate.

'Making a change? Dressing in a hurry.'

'I hope you won't get into trouble; stopping out so late is very dangerous for a young girl. And I suppose you walk up Piccadilly with him after the play?'

'Sometimes he takes me out for a drink,' Hender replied, anxious to avoid a discussion on the subject, but at the same time tempted to make a little boast of her independence. 'But you must come to see *Madame Angot*; I hear it is going to be beautifully put on, and Mr. Lennox is sure to give you a ticket.'

'I dare say I should like it very much; I don't have much amusement.'

'Indeed you don't, and what do you get for it? I don't see that Mr. Ede is so kind to you for all the minding and nursing you do; and old Mrs. Ede may repeat all day long that she's a Christian woman, and what else she likes, but it doesn't make her anything less disagreeable. I wouldn't live in a house with a mother-in-law—and such a mother-in-law!'

'You and Mrs. Ede never hit it off, but I don't know what I should do without her; she's the only friend I've got.'

‘Half your time you’re shut up in a sick-room, and even when he is well he’s always blowing and wheezing; not the man that would suit me.’

‘Ralph can’t help being cross sometimes,’ said Kate, and she fell to thinking of the fatigue of last night’s watching. She felt it still in her bones, and her eyes ached. As she considered the hardships of her life, her manner grew more abandoned.

‘If you’ll let me have the skirt, ma’am, I’ll stitch it up.’

Kate handed her the silk wearily, and was about to speak when Mrs. Ede entered.

‘Mr. Lennox is downstairs,’ she said stiffly. ‘I don’t know what you’ll think of him. I’m a Christian woman and I don’t want to misjudge anyone, but he looks to me like a person of very loose ways.’

Kate flushed a little with surprise, and after a moment she said :

‘I suppose I’d better go down and see him. But perhaps he won’t like the rooms after all. What shall I say to him?’

‘Indeed, I can’t tell you; I’ve the dinner to attend to.’

‘But,’ said Kate, getting frightened, ‘you promised me not to say any more on this matter.’

‘Oh, I say nothing. I’m not mistress here. I told you that I would not interfere with Mr. Lennox; no more will I. Why should I? What right have I? But I may warn you, and I have warned you. I’ve said my say, and I’ll abide by it.’

These hard words only tended to confuse Kate; all her old doubts returned to her, and she remained irresolute. Hender, with an expression of contempt

on her coarse face, watched a moment and then returned to her sewing. As she did so Kate moved towards the door. She waited on the threshold, but seeing that her mother-in-law had turned her back her courage returned to her and she went downstairs. When she caught sight of Mr. Lennox she shrank back frightened, for he was a man of about thirty years of age, with bronzed face, and a shock of frizzly hair, and had it not been for his clear blue eyes he might have passed for an Italian.

Leaning his large back against the counter, he examined a tray of ornaments in black jet. Kate thought he was handsome. He wore a large soft hat, which was politely lifted from his head when she entered. The attention embarrassed her, and somewhat awkwardly she interrupted him to ask if he would like to see the rooms. The suddenness of the question seemed to surprise him, and he began talking of their common acquaintance, the agent in advance, and of the difficulty in getting lodgings in the town. As he spoke he stared at her, and he appeared interested in the shop.

It was a very tiny corner, and, like a Samson, Mr. Lennox looked as if he would only have to extend his arms to pull the whole place down upon his shoulders. From the front window round to the kitchen door ran a mahogany counter; behind it, there were lines of cardboard boxes built up to the ceiling; the lower rows were broken and dusty, and spread upon wires were coarse shirts and a couple of pairs of stays in pink and blue. The windows were filled with babies' frocks, hoods, and many pairs of little woollen shoes.

After a few remarks from Mr. Lennox the conversation came to a pause, and Kate asked him again if he would like to see the rooms. He said he would be delighted, and she lifted the flap and let him pass into the house. On the right of the kitchen door there was a small passage, and at the end of it the staircase began; the first few steps turned spirally, but after that it ascended like a huge canister or burrow to the first landing.

They passed Mrs. Ede gazing scornfully from behind the door of the workroom, but Mr. Lennox did not seem to notice her, and continued to talk affably of the difficulty of finding lodgings in the town.

Even the shabby gentility of the room, which his presence made her realize more vividly than ever, did not appear to strike him. He examined with interest the patchwork cloth that covered the round table, looked complacently at the little green sofa with the two chairs to match, and said that he thought he would be comfortable. But when Kate noticed how dusty was the pale yellow wall-paper, with its watery roses, she could not help feeling ashamed, and she wondered how so fine a gentleman as he could be so easily satisfied. Then, plucking up courage, she showed him the little mahogany chiffonier which stood next the door, and told him that it was there she would keep whatever he might order in the way of drinks. Mr. Lennox walked nearer to the small looking-glass engarlanded with green paper cut into fringes, twirled a slight moustache many shades lighter than his hair, and admired his white teeth.

•

•

The inspection of the drawing room being over, they went up the second portion of the canister-like staircase, and after a turn and a stoop arrived at the bedroom.

'I'm sorry you should see the room like this,' Kate said. 'I thought that my mother-in-law had got the room ready for you. I was obliged to sleep here last night; my husband——'

'I assure you I take no objection to the fact of your having slept here,' he replied gallantly.

Kate blushed, and an awkward silence followed.

As Mr. Lennox looked round an expression of dissatisfaction passed over his face. It was a much poorer place than the drawing-room. Religion and poverty went there hand-in-hand. A rickety iron bedstead covered with another patchwork quilt occupied the centre of the room, and there was a small chest of drawers in white wood placed near the fireplace—the smallest and narrowest in the world. Upon the black painted chimney-piece a large red apple made a spot of colour. The carpet was in rags, and the lace blinds were torn, and hung like fish-nets. Mr. Lennox apparently was not satisfied, but when his eyes fell upon Kate it was clear that he thought that so pretty a woman might prove a compensation. But the pious exhortations hanging on the walls seemed to cause him a certain uneasiness. Above the washstand there were two cards bearing the inscriptions, 'Thou art my hope,' 'Thou art my will'; and these declarations of faith were written within a painted garland of lilies and roses.

'I see that you're religious.'

'I'm afraid not so much as I should be, sir.'

‘Well, I don’t know so much about that; the place is covered with Bible texts.’

‘Those were put there by my mother-in-law: she is very good.’

‘Oh ah,’ said Mr. Lennox, apparently much relieved by the explanation. ‘Old people are very pious, generally, aren’t they? But this patchwork quilt is yours, I suppose?’

‘Yes, sir; I made it myself,’ said Kate, blushing.

He made several attempts at conversation, but she did not respond, her whole mind being held up by the thought: ‘Is he going to take the rooms, I wonder?’ At last he said:

‘I like these apartments very well; and you say that I can have breakfast here?’

‘Oh, you can have anything you order, sir. I, or my mother, will——’

‘Very well, then; we may consider the matter settled. I’ll tell them to send down my things from the theatre.’

This seemed to conclude the affair, and they went downstairs. But Mr. Lennox stopped on the next landing, and without any apparent object re-examined the drawing-room. Speaking like a man who wanted to start a conversation, he manifested interest in everything, and asked questions concerning the rattle of the sewing-machine, which could be heard distinctly and before she could stop him he opened the door of the workroom. He wondered at all the brown-paper patterns that were hung on the walls, and Miss Hender, too eager to inform him, took advantage of the occasion to glide in a word to the effect that she was going to see him that evening at the theatre.

Kate was amused, but felt it was her duty to take the first opportunity of interrupting the conversation. For some unexplained reason Mr. Lennox seemed loath to go, and it was with difficulty he was got downstairs. Even then he could not pass the kitchen door without stopping to speak to the apprentices. He asked them where they had found their broom hair and eyes, and attempted to exchange a remark with Mrs. Ede. Kate thought the encounter unfortunate, but it passed off better than she expected. Mrs. Ede replied that the little girls were getting on very well, and, apparently satisfied with the answer, Mr. Lennox turned to go. His manner indicated his Bohemian habits, for after all the waste of time he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment, and would probably miss it by about a quarter of an hour.

‘Will you require any dinner?’ asked Kate, following him to the door.

At the mention of the word ‘dinner’ he again appeared to forget all about his appointment. His face changed its expression, and his manner again grew confidential. He asked all kind of questions as to what she could get him to eat, but without ever quite deciding whether he would be able to find time to eat it. Kate thought she had never seen such a man. At last in a fit of desperation, he said :

‘I’ll have a bit of cold steak. I haven’t the time to dine, but if you’ll put that out for me . . . like a bit of supper after the theatre——’ . . .

Kate wished to ask him what he would like to drink with it, but it was impossible to get an answer. He couldn’t stop another minute, and, dodging the

passers-by, he rushed rapidly down the street. She watched until the big shoulders were lost in the crowd, and asked herself if she liked the man who had just left her; but the answer slipped from her when she tried to define it, and with a sigh she turned into the shop and mechanically set straight those shirts that hung aslant on the traversing wires. At that moment Mrs. Ede came from the kitchen carrying a basin of soup for her sick son. She wanted to know why Kate had stayed so long talking to that man.

‘Talking to him!’ Kate repeated, surprised at the words and suspicious of an implication of vanity. ‘If we’re going to take his money it’s only right that we should try to make him comfortable.’

‘I doubt if his ten shillings a week will bring us much good,’ Mrs. Ede answered sourly; and she went upstairs, backbone and principles equally rigid, leaving Kate to fume at what she termed her mother-in-law’s unreasonableness.

But Kate had no time to indulge in many angry thoughts, for the tall gaunt woman returned with tears in her eyes to beg pardon.

‘I’m so sorry, dear. Did I speak crossly? I’ll say no more about the actor, I’ll promise.’

‘I don’t see why I should be bullied in my own house,’ Kate answered, feeling that she must assert herself. ‘Why shouldn’t I let my rooms to Mr. Lennox if I like?’

‘You’re right,’ Mrs. Ede replied—‘I’ve said too much; but don’t turn against me, Kate.’

‘No, no, mother; I don’t turn against you. You’re the only person I have to love.’

At these words a look of pleasure passed over the hard, blunt features of the peasant woman, and she said with tears in her voice :

‘ You know I’m a bit hard with my tongue, but that’s all ; I don’t mean it.’

‘ Well, say no more, mother,’ and Kate went upstairs to her workroom. Miss Hender, already returned from dinner, was trembling with excitement, and she waited impatiently for the door to be shut that she might talk. She had been round to see her friend the stage carpenter, and he had told her all about the actor. Mr. Lennox was the boss ; Mr. Hayes, the acting manager, was a nobody, generally pretty well boozed ; and Mr. Cox, the London gent, didn’t travel.

Kate listened, only half understanding what was said.

‘ And what part does he play in *Madame Angot* ?’ she asked as she bent her head to examine the bead trimmings she was stitching on to the sleeves.

‘ The low comedy part,’ said Miss Hender ; but seeing that Kate did not understand, she hastened to explain that the low comedy parts meant the funny parts.

‘ He’s the man who’s lost his wig—La-La Ravodée, I think they call it—and a very nice man he is. When I was talking to Bill I could see Mr. Lennox between the wings ; he had his arm round Miss Leslie’s shoulder. I’m sure he’s sweet on her.’

Kate looked up from her work and stared at Miss Hender slowly. The announcement that Mr. Lennox was the funny man was disappointing, but to hear that he was a woman’s lover turned her against him

‘All those actors are alike. I see now that my mother-in-law was right. I shouldn’t have let him my rooms.’

‘One’s always afraid of saying anything to you, ma’am; you twist one’s words so. I’m sure I didn’t mean to say there was any harm between him and Miss Leslie. There, perhaps you’ll go and tell him that I spoke about him.’

‘I’m sure I shall do nothing of the sort. Mr. Lennox has taken my rooms for a week, and there’s an end of it. I’m not going to interfere in his private affairs.’

The conversation then came to a pause, and all that was heard for a long time was the clicking of the needle and the rustling of silk. Kate wondered how it was that Mr. Lennox was so different off the stage from what he was when on; and it seemed to her strange that such a nice gentleman—for she was obliged to admit that he was that—should choose to play the funny parts. As for his connection with Miss Leslie, that of course was none of her business. What did it matter to her? He was in love with whom he pleased. She’d have thought he was a man who would not easily fall in love; but perhaps Miss Leslie was very pretty, and, for the matter of that, they might be going to be married. Meanwhile Miss Hender regretted having told Kate anything about Mr. Lennox. The best and surest way was to let people find out things for themselves, and having an instinctive repugnance to virtue—at least, to questions of conscience—she could not abide whining about spilt milk. Beyond an occasional reference to their work, the women did not speak again, until at

three o'clock Mrs. Ede announced that dinner was ready. There was not much to eat, however, and Kate had little appetite, and she was glad when the meal was finished. She had then to help Mrs. Ede in getting the rooms ready, and when this was done it was time for tea. But not even this meal did they get in comfort, for Mr. Lennox had ordered a beef-steak for supper; somebody would have to go to fetch it. Mrs. Ede said she would, and Kate went into the shop to attend to the few customers who might call in the course of the evening. The last remarkable event in this day of events was the departure of Miss Hender, who came downstairs saying she had only just allowed herself time to hurry to the theatre; she feared she wouldn't be there before the curtain went up, and she was sorry Kate wasn't coming, but she would tell her to-morrow all about Mr. Lennox, and how the piece went. As Kate bade her assistant good-night a few customers dropped in, all of whom gave a great deal of trouble. She had to pull down a number of packages to find what was wanted. Then her next-door neighbour, the stationer's wife, called to ask after Mr. Ede and to buy a reel of cotton; and so, in evening chat, the time passed, until the fruiterer's boy came to ask if he should put up the shutters.

Kate nodded, and remarked to her friend, who had risen to go, what a nice, kind man Mr. Jones was.

'Yes, indeed, they are very kind people, but their prices are very high. Do you deal with them?'

Kate replied that she did; and, as the fruiterer's boy put up the shutters with a series of bangs, she

tried to persuade her neighbour to buy a certain gown she had been long talking of.

'Trimming and everything, it won't cost you more than thirty shillings; you'll want something fresh now that summer's coming on.'

'So I shall. I'll speak to my man about it to-night. I think he'll let me have it.'

'He won't refuse you if you press him.'

'Well, we shall see,' and bidding Kate good-night she passed into the street.

The evening was fine, and Kate stood for a long while watching the people surging out of the potteries towards Piccadilly. 'Coming out,' she said, 'for their evening walk,' and she was glad that the evening was fine. 'After a long day in the potteries they want some fresh air,' and then, raising her eyes from the streets, she watched the sunset die out of the west; purple and yellow streaks still outlined the grey expanse of the hills, making the brick town look like a little toy. An ugly little brick town—brick of all colours: the pale reddish-brown of decaying brick-yards, the fierce red brick of the newly built warehouses that turns to purple, and above the walls scarlet tiled roofs pointing sharp angles to a few stars.

Kate stood watching the fading of the hills into night clouds, interested in her thoughts vaguely—her thoughts adrift and faded somewhat as the spectacle before her. She wondered if her lodger would be satisfied with her mother's cooking; she hoped so. He was a well-spoken man, but she could not hope to change mother. As the image of the lodger floated out of

her mind Hender's came into it, and she hoped the girl would not get into trouble. So many poor girls are in trouble; how many in the crowd passing before her door? The difficulty she was in with Mrs. Barnes's dress suggested itself, and with a shiver and a sigh she shut the street-door and went upstairs. The day had passed; it was gone like a hundred days before it—wearily, perhaps, yet leaving in the mind an impression of something done, of duties honestly accomplished.

III

'Oh, ma'am!' Hender broke in, 'you can't think how amusing it was last night! I never enjoyed myself so much in my life. 'The place was crammed! Such a house! And Miss Leslie got three encores and a call after each act.'

'And what was Mr. Lennox like?'

'Oh, he only played a small part—one of the policemen. He don't play Pom-poucet; I was wrong. It's too heavy a part, and he's too busy looking after the piece. But Joe Mortimer was splendid; I nearly died of laughing when he fell down and lost his wig in the middle of the stage. And Frank Bret looked such a swell, and he got an encore for the song, "Oh, Certainly I Love Clairette." And he and Miss Leslie got another for the duet. To-morrow they play the *Cloches*.'

'But now you've seen so much of the theatre I hope you'll be able to do a little overtime with me. I've promised to let Mrs. Barnes have her dress by to-morrow morning.'

'I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay after six o'clock.'

'But surely if they're doing the same play you don't want to see it again?'

'Well 'tisn't exactly that, but—well, I prefer to tell you the truth; 'tisn't the piece I go to the theatre for; I'm one of the dressers, and I get twelve shillings a week, and I can't afford to lose it. But there's no use in telling Mrs. Ede, she'd only make a bother.'

'How do you mean, dressing?'

'The ladies of the theatre must have someone to dress them, and I look after the principals, Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont, that's all.'

'And how long have you been doing that?'

'Why, about a month now. Bill got me the place.'

This conversation had broken in upon a silence of nearly half an hour; with bent heads and clicking needles, Kate and Hender had been working assiduously at Mrs. Barnes's skirt.

Having a great deal of *passementerie* ornamentation to sew on to the heading of the flounces, and much fringe to arrange round the edge of the drapery, Kate looked forward to a heavy day. She had expected Miss Hender an hour earlier, and she had not turned up until after nine. An assistant whose time was so occupied that she couldn't give an extra hour when you were in a difficulty was of very little use; and it might be as well to look out for somebody more suitable. Besides, all this talk about theatres and actors was very wrong; there could be little doubt that the girl was losing her character, and to have her coming about the house

•

would give it a bad name. Such were Kate's reflections as she handled the rustling silk and folded it into large plaitings. Now and again she tried to come to a decision, but she was not sincere with herself. She knew she liked the girl, and Hender's conversation amused her: to send her away meant to surrender herself completely to her mother-in-law's stern kindness and her husband's irritability.

Hender was the window through which Kate viewed the bustle and animation of life, and even now, annoyed as she was that she would not be able to get the dress done in time, she could not refrain from listening to the girl's chatter. There was about Miss Hender that strange charm which material natures possess even when they offend. Being of the flesh, we must sympathize with it, and the amiability of Hender's spirits made a great deal pass that would have otherwise appeared wicked. She could tell without appearing too rude, how Mr. Wentworth, the lessee, was gone on a certain lady in the new company, and would give her anything if she would chuck up her engagement and come and live with him. When Hender told these stories, Kate, fearing that Mrs. Ede might have overheard, looked anxiously at the door, and under the influence of the emotion, it interested her to warn her assistant of the perils of frequenting bad company. But as Kate lectured she could not help wondering how it was that her life passed by so wearily. Was she never going to do anything else but work? she often asked herself, and then reproached herself for the regret that had risen unwittingly up in her mind that life was not all pleasure. It certainly was not,

'but perhaps it is better,' she said to herself, 'that we have to get our living, for me at least'—her thoughts broke off sharply, and she passed out of the present into a long past time.

Kate had never known her father; her mother, an earnest believer in Wesley, was a hard-working woman who made a pound a week by painting on china. This was sufficient for their wants, and Mrs. Howell's only fears were that she might lose her health and die before her time, leaving her daughter in want. To avoid this fate she worked early and late at the factory, and Kate was left in the charge of the landlady, a childless old woman who, sitting by the fire, used to tell stories of her deceptions and misfortunes in life, thereby intoxicating the little girl's brain with sentiment. The mother's influence was a sort of make-weight; Mrs. Howell was a deeply religious woman, and Kate was often moved to trace back a large part of herself to Bible-readings and extemporary prayers offered up by the bedside in the evening.

Her school-days were unimportant. She learnt to read and write and to do sums; that was all. Kate grew, softly and mystically as a dark damask rose, into a pretty woman without conversions or passions: for notwithstanding her early training, religion had never taken a very firm hold upon her, and despite the fact that she married into a family very similar to her own, although her mother-in-law was almost a counterpart of her real mother—a little harder and more resolute, but as God-fearing and as kind—Kate had caught no blast of religious fervour; religion taught her nothing, inspired her with nothing, could

•

•

influence her in little. She was not strong nor great, nor was she conscious of any deep feeling that if she acted otherwise than she did she would be living an unworthy life. She was merely good because she was a kind-hearted woman, without bad impulses, and admirably suited to the life she was leading.

But in this commonplace inactivity of mind there was one strong characteristic, one bit of colour in all these grey tints: Kate was dreamy, not to say imaginative. When she was a mere child she loved fairies, and took a vivid interest in goblins; and when afterwards she discarded these stories for others, it was not because it shocked her logical sense to read of a beanstalk a hundred feet high, but for a tenderer reason: Jack did not find a beautiful lady to love him. She could not help feeling disappointed, and when the *London Journal* came for the first time across her way, with the story of a broken heart, her own heart melted with sympathy; the more sentimental and unnatural the romance, the more it fevered and enraptured her. She loved to read of singular subterranean combats, of high castles, prisoners, hair-breadth escapes; and her sympathies were always with the fugitives. It was also very delightful to hear of lovers who were true to each other in spite of a dozen wicked uncles, of women who were tempted until their hearts died within them, and who years after threw up their hands and said, 'Thank God that I had the courage to resist!'

The second period of her sentimental education was when she passed from the authors who deal exclusively with knights, princesses, and kings to those

who interest themselves in the love fortunes of doctors and curates.

Amid these there was one story that interested her in particular, and caused her deeper emotions than the others. It concerned a beautiful young woman with a lovely oval face, who was married to a very tiresome country doctor. This lady was in the habit of reading Byron and Shelley in a rich, sweet-scented meadow, down by the river, which flowed dreamily through smiling pasture-lands adorned by spreading trees. But this meadow belonged to a squire, a young man with grand, broad shoulders, who day after day used to watch these readings by the river without venturing to address a word to the fair trespasser. One day, however, he was startled by a shriek: in her poetical dreamings the lady had slipped into the water. A moment sufficed to tear off his coat, and as he swam like a water-dog he had no difficulty in rescuing her. Of course after this adventure he had to call and inquire, and from henceforth his visits grew more and more frequent, and by a strange coincidence, he used to come riding up to the hall-door when the husband was away curing the ills of the country-folk. Hours were passed under the trees by the river, he pleading his cause, and she refusing to leave poor Arthur, till at last the squire gave up the pursuit and went to foreign parts, where he waited thirty years, until he heard Arthur was dead. And then he came back with a light heart to his first and only love, who had never ceased to think of him, and lived with her happily for ever afterwards. The grotesque mixture of prose and poetry, both equally false, used to enchant Kate, and she

always fancied that had she been the heroine of the book she would have acted in the same way.

Kate's taste for novel-reading distressed Mrs. Howell; she thought it 'a sinful waste of time, not to speak of the way it turned people's heads from God'; and when one day she found Kate's scrap-book, made up of poems cut from the *Family Herald*, she began to despair of her daughter's salvation. The answer Kate made to her mother's reproaches was: 'Mother, I've been sewing all day; I can't see what harm it can be to read a little before I go to bed. Nobody is required to be always saying their prayers.'

The next two years passed away unperceived by either mother or daughter, and then an event occurred of some importance. Their neighbours at the corner of the street got into difficulties, and were eventually sold out and their places taken by strangers, who changed the oil-shop into a drapery business. The new arrivals aroused the keenest interest, and Mrs. Howell and her daughter called to see what they were like, as did everybody else. The acquaintance thus formed was renewed at church, and much to their surprise and pleasure, they discovered that they were of the same religious persuasion.

Henceforth the Howells and Edes saw a great deal of each other, and every Sunday after church the mothers walked home together and the young people followed behind. Ralph spoke of his ill-health, and Kate pitied him, and when he complimented her on her beautiful hair she blushed with pleasure. For much as she had revelled in fictitious sentiment, she

had somenow never thought of seeking it in nature and now that she had found a lover, the critical sense was not strong enough in her to lead her to compare reality with imagination. She accepted Ralph as unsuspectingly as she hitherto accepted the tawdry poetry of her favourite fiction. And her nature not being a passionate one, she was able to do this without any apparent transition of sentiment. She pitied him, hoped she could be of use in nursing him, and felt flattered at the idea of being mistress of a shop. •

The mothers were delighted, and spoke of the coincidence of their religions and the admirable addition dressmaking would be to the drapery business. •Of love, small mention was made. The bridegroom spoke of his prospects of improving the business, the bride listened, interested for the while in his enthusiasm; orders came in, and Kate was soon transformed into a hard-working woman.

This change of character passed unperceived by all but Mrs. Howell, who died wondering how it came about. Kate herself did not know; she fancied that it was fully accounted for by the fact that she had no time—‘no time for reading now’—which was no more than the truth; but she did not complain; she accepted her husband’s kisses as she did the toil he imposed on her—meekly, unaffectedly, as a matter of course, as if she always knew that the romances which used to fascinate her were merely idle dreams, having no bearing upon the daily life of human beings—things fit to amuse a young girl’s fancies, and to be thrown aside when the realities of life were entered upon. The only analogy between

•

the past and present was an ample submission to authority and an indifference to the world and its interest. Even the fact of being without children did not seem to concern her, and when her mother-in-law regretted it she merely smiled languidly, or said, 'We are very well as we are.' Of the world and the flesh she lived almost in ignorance, suspecting their existence only through Miss Hender. Hender was attracted by her employer's kindness and softness of manner, and Kate by her assistant's strength of will. For some months past a friendship had been growing up between the two women, but if Kate had known for certain that Hender was living a life of sin with the stage carpenter she might not have allowed her into the house. But the possibility of sin attached her to the girl in the sense that it forced her to think of her continually. And then there was a certain air of bravado in Miss Hender's freckled face that Kate admired. She instituted comparisons between herself and the assistant, and she came to the conclusion that she preferred that fair, blonde complexion to her own clear olive skin; and the sparkle of the red frizzy hair put her out of humour with the thick, wavy blue tresses which encircled her small temples like a piece of black velvet.

As she continued her sewing she reconsidered the question of Hender's dismissal, but only to perceive more and more clearly the blank it would occasion in her life. And besides her personal feeling there was the fact to consider that to satisfy her customers she must have an assistant who could be depended upon. And she did not know where she would find

another who would turn out work equal to Hender's. At last Kate said :

‘I don't know what I shall do; I promised the dress by to-morrow morning.’

‘I think we'll be able to finish it to-day,’ Hender answered. ‘I'll work hard at it all the afternoon; a lot can be done between this and seven o'clock.’

‘Oh, I don't know,’ replied Kate dolefully; ‘these leaves take such a time to sew on; and then there's all the festooning.’

‘I think it can be managed, but we must stick at it.’

On this expression of good-will the conversation ceased for the time being, and the clicking of needles and the buzzing of flies about the brown-paper patterns were all that was heard until twelve o'clock, when Mrs. Ede burst into the room.

‘I knew what it would be,’ she said, shutting the door after her.

‘What is it?’ said Kate, looking up frightened.

‘Well, I offered to do him a chop or some fried eggs, but he says he must have an omelette. Did you ever hear of such a thing? I told him I didn't know how to make one, but he said that I was to ask you if you could spare the time.’

‘I'll make him an omelette,’ said Kate, rising. ‘Have you got the eggs?’

‘Yes. The trouble that man gives us! What with his bath in the morning, and two pairs of boots to be cleaned, and the clothes that have to be brushed, I've done nothing but attend to him since ten o'clock; and what hours to keep!—it is now past eleven.’

'What's the use of grumbling? You know the work must be done, and I can't be in two places at once. You promised me you wouldn't say anything more about it, but would attend to him just the same as any other lodger.'

'I can't do more than I'm doing; I haven't done anything all the morning but run upstairs,' said Mrs. Ede very crossly; 'and I wish you'd take the little girls out of the kitchen; I can't look after them, and they do nothing but look out of the window.'

'Very well, I'll have them up herê; they can sit on the sofa. We can manage with them now that we've finished the cutting out.'

Hender made no reply to this speech, which was addressed to her. She hated having the little girls up in the workroom, and Kate knew it.

Kate did not take long to make Mr. Lennox's omelette. There was a bright fire in the kitchen, the muffins were toasted, and the tea was made.

'This is a very small breakfast,' she said as she put the plates and dishes on the tray. 'Didn't he order anything else?'

'He spoke about some fried bacon, but I'll attend to that; you take the other things up to him.'

As Kate passed with the tray in her hand she reproved the little girls for their idleness and told them to come upstairs, but it was not until she motioned them into the workroom that she realized that she was going into Mr. Lennox's room.

After a slight pause she turned the handle of the door and entered. Mr. Lennox was lying very negligently in the armchair, wrapped in his dressing-gown. 'Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't

know——' she said, starting back. Then, blushing for shame at her own silliness in taking notice of such things, she laid the breakfast things on the table.

Mr. Lennox thanked her, and without seeming to notice her discomfiture he wrapped himself up more closely, drew his chair forward, and, smacking his lips, took the cover off the dish. 'Oh, very nice indeed,' he said, 'but I'm afraid I've given you a great deal of trouble; the old lady said you were very, very busy.'

'I've to finish a dress to-day, sir, and my assistant——'

Here Kate stopped, remembering that if Mr. Lennox had renewed his acquaintance with Hender at the theatre, any allusion to her would give rise to further conversation. 'Oh yes, I know Miss Hender; she's one of our dressers; she looks after our two leading ladies, Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont. But I don't see the bacon here.'

'Mrs. Ede is cooking it; she'll bring it up in a minute or two,' Kate answered, edging towards the door.

'We've nothing to do with the dressers,' said Mr. Lennox, speaking rapidly, so as to detain his landlady; 'but if you're as pressed with your work as you tell me, I dare say, by speaking to the lessee, I might manage to get Miss Hender off for this one evening.'

'Thank you, sir; I'm sure it's very kind of you, but I shall be able to manage without that.'

The lodger spoke with such an obvious desire to oblige that Kate could not choose but like him, and it made her wish all the more that he would cover up his big, bare neck.

'Pon my word, this is a capital omelette,' he said,

licking his lips. 'There is nothing I like so much as a good omelette. I was very lucky to come here,' he added, glancing at Kate's waist, which was slim even in her old blue striped dress.

'It's very kind of you to say so, sir,' she said, and a glow of rose-colour flushed the dark complexion. There was something very human in this big man, and Kate did not know whether his animalism irritated or pleased her.

'You weren't at the theatre last night?' he said, forcing a huge piece of deeply buttered, spongy French roll into his mouth.

'No, sir, I wasn't there; I rarely go to the theatre.'

'Ah! I'm sorry. How's that? We had a tremendous house. I never saw the piece go better. If this business keeps up to the end of the week I think we shall try to get another date.'

Kate did not know what 'another date' meant, but Hender would be able to tell her.

'You've only to tell me when you want to see the piece, and I'll give you places. Would you like to come to-night?'

'Not to-night, thank you, sir. I shall be busy all the evening, and my husband is not very well.'

The conversation then came to an irritating pause. Mr. Lennox had scraped up the last fragments of the omelette, and poured himself out another cup of tea, when Mrs. Ede appeared with the broiled bacon. On seeing Kate talking to Mr. Lennox, she at once assumed an air of mingled surprise and regret.

Kate noticed this, but Mr. Lennox had no eyes for anything but the bacon, which he heaped on his plate and devoured voraciously. It pleased Kate

to see him enjoy his breakfast, but while she was admiring him Mrs. Ede said as she moved towards the door, 'Can I do anything for you, sir?'

'Well, no,' replied Mr. Lennox indifferently; but seeing that Kate was going too he swallowed a mouthful of tea hastily and said, 'I was just telling the lady here that we had a tremendous success last night, and that she ought to come and see the piece. I think she said she had no one to go with. You should take her. I'm sure you will like the *Cloches*.'

Mrs. Ede looked indignant, but after a moment she recovered herself, and said severely and emphatically: 'Thank you, sir, but I'm a Christian woman. No offence, sir, but I don't think such things are right.'

'Ah! don't you, indeed?' replied the mummer, looking at her in blank astonishment. But the expression of his face soon changed, and as if struck suddenly by some painful remembrance, he said, 'You're a Dissenter or something of that kind, I suppose. We lost a lot of money at Bradford through people of your persuasion; they jolly well preached against us.'

Mrs. Ede did not answer, and after a few brief apologetic phrases to the effect that it would not do for us all to think alike, Kate withdrew to her work-room, asking herself if Mr. Lennox would take offence and leave them. Hender suspected that something had occurred, and was curious to hear what it was; but there sat those idiotic little girls, and of course it wouldn't do to speak before them. Once she hinted that she had heard that Mr. Lennox, though a very nice man, was a bit quick-tempered,

a query that Kate answered evasively, saying that it was difficult to know what Mr. Lennox was like. Words were an effort to her, and she could not detach a single precise thought from the leaden-coloured dreams which hung about her.

Click, click, went the needles all day long, and Kate wondered what a woman who lived in a thirty-pound house could want with a ten-pound dress. But that was no affair of hers, and as it was most important she should not disappoint her, Kate kept Hender to dinner; and as compensation for the press of work, she sent round to the public for three extra half-pints. They needed a drink, for the warmth of the day was intense. Along the red tiles of the houses, amid the brick courtyards, the sun's rays created an oven-like atmosphere. From the high wall opposite the dead glare poured into the little front kitchen through the muslin blinds burning the pot of green-stuff, and falling in large spots upon the tiled floor; and overcome by the heat, the two women lay back on the little red calico-covered sofa, languidly sipping their beer, and thinking vaguely of when they would have to begin work again. Hender lolled with her legs stretched out; Kate rested her head upon her hand wearily; Mrs. Ede sat straight, apparently unheeding the sunlight which fell across the plaid shawl that she wore winter and summer. She drank her beer in quick gulps, as if even the time for swallowing was rigidly portioned out. The others watched her, knowing that when her pewter was empty she would turn them out of the kitchen. In a few moments she said, 'I think, Kate, that if you're in a hurry

you'd better get on with your dress. I have to see to Mr. Lennox's dinner, and I can't have you a-hanging about. As it is, I don't know how I'm to get the work done. There's a leg of mutton to be roasted, and a pudding to be made, and all by four o'clock.'

Kate calmed the old woman with a few words, and taking Ralph's dinner from her, carried it upstairs. She found her husband better, and, setting the tray on the edge of the bed, she answered the questions he put to her concerning the actor briefly; then begged of him to excuse her, as she heard voices in the shop. Mr. Lennox had come in bringing two men with him, Joe Mortimer, the low comedian, and young Montgomery, the conductor; and it became difficult to prevent Hender from listening at the doors, and almost useless to remind her of the fact that there were children present, so excited did she become when she spoke of Bret's love affairs.

But at six o'clock she put on her hat, and there was no dissuading her; Mrs. Barnes must wait for her dress. There was still much to be done, and when Mrs. Ede called from the kitchen that tea was ready, Kate did not at first answer, and when at last she descended she remained only long enough to eat a piece of bread and butter. Her head was filled with grave forebodings, that gradually drifted and concentrated into one fixed idea—not to disappoint Mrs. Barnes. Once quite suddenly, she was startled by an idea which flashed across her mind, and stopping in the middle of a 'leaf,' she considered the question that had propounded itself. Lodgers often make love to their landladies; what would she do if Mr. Lennox made love to her? Such a thing

might occur. An expression of annoyance contracted her face, and she resumed her sewing. The hours passed slowly and oppressively. It was now ten o'clock, and the tail had still to be bound with braid, and the side strings to be sewn in. She had no tape by her, and thought of putting off these finishing touches till the morning, but plucking up her courage, she determined to go down and fetch from the shop what was required. The walk did her good, but it was hard to sit down to work again; and the next few minutes seemed to her interminable: but at last the final stitch was given, the thread bitten off, and the dress held up in triumph. She looked at it for a moment with a feeling of pride, which soon faded into a sensation of indifference.

All the same her day's labour was over; she was now free. But the thought carried a bitterness: she remembered that there was no place for her to go to but her sick husband's room. Yet she had been looking forward to having at least one night's rest, and it exasperated her to think that there was nothing for her but a hard pallet in the back room, and the certainty of being awakened several times to attend to Ralph. She asked herself passionately if she was always going to remain a slave and a drudge? Hender's words came back to her with a strange distinctness, and she saw that she knew nothing of pleasure, or even of happiness; and in a very simple way she wondered what were really the ends of life. If she were good and religious like her mother or her mother-in-law—— But somehow she could never feel as they did. Heaven seemed so far away. Of course it was a consolation to think there was a

happier and better world; still—still—— Not being able to pursue the thread any further, she stopped, puzzled, and a few moments after she was thinking of the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley, and who resisted her lover's entreaties so bravely. Every part of the forgotten story came back to her. She realized the place they used to dream in. She could see them watching with ardent eyes the paling of the distant sky as they listened to the humming of insects, breathing the honied odour of the flowers; she saw her leaning on his arm caressingly, whilst pensively she tore with the other hand the leaves as they passed up the long terrace.

Then as the vision became more personal and she identified herself with the heroine of the book, she thought of the wealth of love she had to give, and it seemed to her unutterably sad that it should bloom like a rose in a desert unknown and unappreciated.

This was the last flight of her dream. The frail wings of her imagination could sustain her no longer, and too weary to care for or even to think of anything, she went upstairs, to find Mrs. Ede painting her son's chest and back with iodine. He had a bad attack, which was beginning to subside. His face was haggard, his eyes turgid, and the two women talked together. Mrs. Ede was indignant, and told of all her trouble with the dinner. She had to fetch cigars and drinks. Kate listened, watching her husband all the while. He began to get a little better, and Mrs. Ede took advantage of the occasion to suggest that it was time for evening prayers.

In days when speech was possible, it was Ralph who read the customary chapter of the Bible and led

the way with the Lord's Prayer; but when words were forbidden to him his mother supplied his place. The tall figure knelt upright. It was not a movement of cringing humility, but of stalwart belief, and as she handed her the Bible, Kate could not help thinking that there was pride in her mother-in-law's very knees.

The old woman turned over the leaves for a few seconds in silence; then, having determined on a chapter, she began to read. But she had not got beyond a few sentences before she was interrupted by the sound of laughing voices and stamping feet.

She stopped reading, and looked from Kate to her husband. He was at the moment searching for his pocket-handkerchief. Kate rose to assist him, and Mrs. Ede said:

'It's shameful! it's disgraceful!'

'It's only Mr. Lennox coming in.'

'Only Mr. Lennox!' At that moment she was interrupted by the lighter laughter of female voices; she paused to listen, and then, shutting the book fiercely, she said, 'From the first I was against letting our rooms to a mummer; but I didn't think I should live to see my son's house turned into a night house. I shall not stop here.'

'Not stop here—eh, eh? We must tell—tell him that it can't be allowed,' Ralph wheezed.

'And I should like to know who these women are he has dared to bring into——. People he has met in Piccadilly, I suppose!'

'Oh no!' interrupted Kate, 'I'm sure that they are the ladies of the theatre.'

'And where's the difference?' Mrs. Ede asked

fiercely. Sectarian hatred of worldly amusement flamed in her eyes, and made common cause with the ordinary prejudice of the British landlady. Mr. Ede shared his mother's opinions, but as he was then suffering from a splitting headache, his chief desire was that she should lower the tone of her voice.

'For goodness' sake don't speak so loud!' he said plaintively. 'Of course he mustn't bring women into the house; but he had better be told so. Kate go down and tell him that these ladies must leave.'

Kate stood aghast at hearing her fate thus determined, and she asked herself how she was to tell Mr. Lennox that he must put his friends out of doors. She hesitated, and during a long silence all three listened. A great guffaw, a woman's shriek, a peal of laughter, and then a clinking of glasses was heard. Even Kate's face told that she thought it very improper, and Mrs. Ede said with a theatrical air of suppressed passion:

'Very well; I suppose that is all that can be done at present.'

Feeling very helpless, Kate murmured, 'I don't see how I'm to tell them to go. Hadn't we better put it off until morning.'

'Till morning!' said Mr. Ede, trying to button his dirty nightshirt across his hairy chest. 'I'm not going to listen to that noise all night. Kate, you g-go and sur-r-rn them out.'

'I'm sorry, dearie,' said Mrs. Ede, seeing her laughter-in-law's distress. 'I'll soon send them away.'

'Oh no! I'd rather go myself,' said Kate.

'Very well, dear. I only thought you might not like to go down among a lot of rough people.

The noise downstairs was in the meanwhile increasing, and Ralph grew as angry as his asthma would allow him. 'They're just killing me with their noise. Go down at once and tell them they must leave the house instantly. If you don't I'll go myself.'

Mrs. Ede made a movement towards the door, but Kate stopped her, saying :

'I'll go; it's my place.' As she descended the stairs she heard a man's voice screaming above the general hubbub :

'I'll tell you what; if Miss Beaumont doesn't wait for my beat another night, I'll insist on a rehearsal being called. She took the concerted music in the finale of the first act two whole bars before her time. It was damned awful. I nearly broke my stick trying to stop her.'

'Quite true; I never saw the piece go so badly. Bret was "fluffing" all over the shop.'

Kate listened to these fragments of conversation, asked herself how she was to walk in upon those people and tell them that they must keep quiet.

'And the way Beaumont tries to spoon with Dick. She nearly missed her cue once with sneaking after him in the wings.'

A peal of laughter followed. This sally determined Kate to act; and without having made up her mind what to say, she turned the handle of the door and walked into the room.

The three gas-burners were blazing, wine-glasses were on the table, and Mr. Lennox stood twisting a

corkscrew into a bottle which he held between his fat thighs. On the little green sofa Miss Lucy Leslie lay back playing with her bonnet-strings. Her legs were crossed, and a lifted skirt showed a bit of striped stocking. Next her, with his spare legs sprawled over the arm of the easy-chair, was Mr. Montgomery, the thinnest being possible to imagine, in grey clothes. His nose was enormous, and he pushed up his glasses when Kate came into the room with a movement of the left hand that was clearly habitual. On the other side of the round table sat Mr. Joe Mortimer, the heavy lead, the celebrated miser in the *Cloches*. A tall girl standing behind him playfully twisted his back hair. He addressed paternal admonitions to her from time to time in an artificially cracked voice.

'Please, sir,' said Kate pleadingly, 'I'm very sorry, but we cannot keep open house after eleven o'clock.'

A deep silence followed this announcement. Miss Leslie looked up at Kate curiously. Mr. Lennox stopped twisting the corkscrew into the bottle, and the low comedian, seizing the opportunity, murmured in his mechanical voice to the girl behind him, 'Open house! Of course, she's quite right. I knew there was a draught somewhere; I felt my hair blowing about.'

Everybody laughed, and the merriment still contributed to discountenance the workwoman.

'Will he never speak and let me go?' she asked herself. At last he did speak, and his words fell upon her like blows.

'I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Ede,' he said in a loud, commanding voice. 'I made no agree

ment with you that I wasn't to bring friends home with me in the evening. Had I known that I was taking lodgings in a church I wouldn't have come.'

She felt dreadfully humiliated, and nothing was really present in her mind but a desire to conciliate Mr. Lennox.

'It isn't my fault, sir. I really don't mind; but my mother-in-law and my husband won't have people coming into the house after ten o'clock.'

Mr. Lennox's face showed that his heart had softened towards her, and when she mentioned that her husband was lying ill in bed, turning round to his company, he said :

'I think we are making too much noise; we shouldn't like it ourselves if——'

But just at that moment, when all was about to end pleasantly, Mrs. Ede was heard at the top of the stairs.

'I'm a Christian woman, and will not remain in a house where drinking and women——'

This speech changed everything. Mr. Lennox's eyes flashed passion, and he made a movement as if he were going to shout an answer back to Mrs. Ede, but checking himself, he said, addressing Kate, 'I beg that you leave my rooms, ma'am. You can give me warning in the morning if you like, or rather, I'll give it to you; but for this evening, at least, the place is mine, and I shall do what I like.' On that he advanced towards the door and threw it open.

Tears stood in her eyes. She looked sorrowfully at Mr. Lennox. He noticed the pitiful, appealing glance, but was too angry to understand. The look was her whole soul. She did not see Miss Leslie

sneering, nor Mr. Montgomery's grinning face. She saw nothing but Mr. Lennox, and, stunned by the thought of his leaving them, she followed her mother-in-law upstairs. The old woman scolded and rowed. To have that lot of men and women smoking and drinking after eleven o'clock in the house was not to be thought of, and she tried to force her son to say that the police must be sent for. But it was impossible to get an answer from him; the excitement and effort of speaking had rendered him speechless, and holding his moppy black hair with both hands, he wheezed in deep organ tones. Kate looked at him blankly, and longed for some place out of hearing of his breath and out of the smell of the medicine-bottles. His mother was now insisting on his taking a couple of pills, and called upon Kate to find the box. The sharp, sickly odour of the aloes was abominable, and with her stomach turning, she watched her husband trying vainly to swallow the dose with the aid of a glass of water. Stop in this room! No, that she couldn't do! It would poison her. She wanted sleep and fresh air. Where could she get them? The mummer was in the spare room; but he would be gone to-morrow, and she would be left alone. The thought startled her, though she soon forgot it in her longing to get out of her husband's sight. Every moment this desire grew stronger, and at last she said:

'I cannot stay here; another night would kill me. Will you let me have your room?'

'Certainly I will, my dear,' replied the old woman, astonished not so much at the request, but at the vehemence of the emphasis laid upon the words.

'You're looking dreadfully worn out, my dear; I'll see to my boy.'

As soon as her request had been granted, Kate hesitated as if she feared she was doing wrong, and she looked at her husband, wondering if he would call her back.

But he took no heed; his attention was too entirely occupied by his breath to think either of her or of the necessity of sending for the police, and he waved his mother away when she attempted to speak to him:

'Are those men going to stop there all night?' Mrs. Ede asked.

'Oh, I really don't know; I'm too tired to bother about it any more,' replied Kate petulantly. 'It's all your fault—you're to blame for everything; you've no right to interfere with the lodgers in my house.'

Mrs. Ede raised her arms as she sought for words, but Kate walked out of the room without giving her time to answer. Suddenly a voice cried in a high key:

'Who do you take me for, Dick? I wasn't born yesterday. A devilish pretty woman, if you ask me. What hair!—like velvet!'

Kate stopped. 'Black hair,' she said to herself—'they must be talking of me,' and she listened intently.

The remark, however, did not appear to have been particularly well-timed, for after a long silence, a woman's voice said:

'Well, I don't know whether he liked her, and I don't care, but what I'm not going to do is to wait

here listening to you all cracking up a landlady's good looks. I'm off.'

A scuffle then seemed to be taking place; half a dozen voices spoke together, and in terror of her life Kate flew across the workroom to Mrs. Ede's bed.

The door of the sitting-room was flung open and cajoling and protesting words echoed along the passage up and down the staircase. It was disgraceful, and Kate expected every minute to hear her mother-in-law's voice mingling in the fray; but peace was restored, and for at least an hour she listened to sounds of laughing voices mingling with the clinking of glasses. At last Dick wished his friends good-night, and Kate lay under the sheets and listened. Something was going to happen. 'He thinks me a pretty woman; she is jealous,' were phrases that rang without ceasing in her ears. Then, hearing his door open, she fancied he was coming to seek her, and in consternation buried herself under the bedclothes, leaving only her black hair over the pillows to show where she had disappeared. But the duplicate drop of a pair of boots was conclusive, and assuring herself that he would not venture on such a liberty, she strove to compose herself to sleep.

IV

NEXT day, about eleven o'clock, Kate walked up Market Street with Mrs. Barnes's dress, meditating on the letter she had received. A very serious matter this angry letter was to Kate, and she thought of what she could say to satisfy her customer. Her anxiety of mind caused her to walk faster than she

was aware of, up the hill towards the square of sky where the passers-by seemed like figures on the top of a monument. At the top of the hill she would turn to the left and descend towards the little quasi-villa residences which form the suburbs of Northwood. Ten minutes later Kate approached Mrs. Barnes's door hot and out of breath, her plans matured, determined, if the worst came to the worst, to let the dress go at a reduction. Her present difficulty was so great that she forgot other troubles, and it was not until she had received her money that she remembered Mr. Lennox. He was going. Her rooms would be empty again. She was sorry he was going, and at the top of Market Street she stood at gaze, surprised by the view, though she had never seen any other. A long black valley lay between her and the dim hills far away, miles and miles in length, with tanks of water glittering like blades of steel, and gigantic smoke clouds rolling over the stems of a thousand factory chimneys. She had not come up this hillside at the top of Market Street for a long while; for many years she had not stood there and gazed at the view, not since she was a little girl, and the memories that she cherished in her work-room between Hanley and the Wever Hills were quite different from the scene she was now looking upon. She saw the valley with different eyes: she saw it now with a woman's eyes; before she had seen it with a child's eyes. She remembered the ruined collieries and the black cinder-heaps protruding through the hillside on which she was now standing. In childhood these ruins were convenient places to play hide-and-seek in. But now they seemed to,

convey a meaning to her mind, a meaning that was not very clear, that perplexed her, that she tried to put aside and yet could not. At her left, some fifty feet below, running in the shape of a fan, round a belt of green, were the roofs of Northwood—black brick unrelieved except by the yellow chimney-pots, specks of colour upon a line of soft cotton-like clouds melting into grey, the grey passing into blue, and the blue spaces widening. 'It will be a hot day,' she said to herself, and fell to thinking that a hot day was hotter on this hillside than elsewhere. At every moment the light grew more and more intense, till a distant church spire faded almost out of sight, and she was glad she had come up here to admire the view from the top of Market Street. Southwark, on the right, as black as Northwood, toppled into the valley in irregular lines, the jaded houses seeming in Kate's fancy like cart-loads of gigantic pill-boxes cast in a hurry from the counter along the floor. It amused her to stand gazing, contrasting the reality with her memories. It seemed to her that Southwark had never before been so plain to the eye. She could follow the lines of the pavement and almost distinguish the men from the women passing. A hansom appeared and disappeared, the white horse seen now against the green blinds of a semi-detached villa and shown a moment after against the yellow rotundities of a group of pottery ovens.

The sun was now rapidly approaching the meridian, and in the vibrating light the wheels of the most distant collieries could almost be counted, and the stems of the far-off factory chimneys appeared like tiny fingers.

Kate saw with the eyes and heard with the ears of her youth, and the past became as clear as the landscape before her. She remembered the days when she came to read on this hillside. The titles of the books rose up in her mind, and she could recall the sorrow she felt for the heroes and heroines. It seemed to her strange that that time was so long past and she wondered why she had forgotten it. Now it all seemed so near to her that she felt like one only just awakened from a dream. And these memories made her happy. She took pleasure in recalling every little event—an excursion she made when she was quite a little girl to the ruined colliery, and later on, a conversation with a chance acquaintance, a young man who had stopped to speak to her.

At the bottom of the valley, right before her eyes, the white gables of Bucknell Rectory, hidden amid masses of trees, glittered now and then in an entangled beam that flickered between chimneys, across brick-banked squares of water darkened by brick walls.

Behind Bucknell were more desolate plains full of pits, brick, and smoke; and beyond Bucknell an endless tide of hills rolled upwards and onwards.

The American tariff had not yet come into operation, and every wheel was turning, every oven baking; and through a drifting veil of smoke the sloping sides of the hills with all their fields could be seen sleeping under great shadows, or basking in the light. A deluge of rays fell upon them, defining every angle of Watley Rocks and floating over the grasslands of Standon, all shape becoming lost in a huge

embrasure filled with the almost imperceptible outlines of the Wever Hills.

And these vast slopes which formed the background of every street were the theatre of all Kate's travels before life's struggles began. It amused her to remember that when she played about the black cinders of the hillsides she used to stop to watch the sunlight flash along the far-away green spaces, and in her thoughts connected them with the marvels she read of in her books of fairy-tales. Beyond these wonderful hills were the palaces of the kings and queens who would wave their wands and vanish! A few years later it was among or beyond those slopes that the lovers with whom she sympathized in the pages of her novels lived. But it was a long time since she had read a story, and she asked herself how this was. Dreams had gone out of her life, everything was a hard reality; her life was like a colliery, every wheel was turning, no respite day or night; her life would be always the same, a burden and a misery. There never could be any change now. She remembered her marriage, and how Mrs. Ede had persuaded her into it, and for the first time she blamed the old woman for her interference. But this was not all. Kate was willing to admit that there was no one she loved like Mr. Ede, but still it was hard to live with a mother-in-law who had a finger in everything and used the house like her own. It would be all very well if she were not so obstinate, so certain that she was always right. Religion was very well, but that perpetual 'I'm a Christian woman,' was wearisome. No wonder Mr. Lennox was leaving. Poor man,

why shouldn't he have a few friends up in the evening? The lodgings were his own while he paid for them. No wonder he cut up rough; no wonder he was leaving them. If so, she would never see him again. The thought caught her like a pain in the throat, and with a sudden instinct she turned to hurry home. As she did so her eyes fell on Mr. Lennox walking towards her. At such an unexpected realization of her thoughts she uttered a little cry of surprise; but, smiling affably, and in no way disconcerted, he raised his big hat from his head. On account of the softness of the felt this could only be accomplished by passing the arm over the head and seizing the crown as a conjurer would a pocket-handkerchief. The movement was large and unctuous, and it impressed Kate considerably.

'I took the liberty to stop, for you seemed so interested that I felt curious to know what could be worth looking at in those chimneys and cinder-mounds.'

'I wasn't looking at the factories, but at the hills. The view from here is considered very fine. Don't you think so, sir?' she asked, feeling afraid that she had made some mistake.

'Ah, well, now you mention it, perhaps it is. How far away, and yet how distinct! They look like the gallery of a theatre. We're on the stage, the foot-lights run round here, and the valley is the pit; and there are plenty of pits in it,' he added, laughing. 'But I mustn't speak to you of the theatre.'

'Oh, I'm sure I don't mind! I'm very fond of the theatre,' said Kate hastily.

This indirect allusion to last night brought the

conversation to a close, and for some moments they stood looking vacantly at the landscape. Overhead the sky was a blue dome, and so still was the air that the smoke-clouds trailed like the wings of gigantic birds slowly balancing themselves. And waves of white light rolled up the valley as if jealous of the red, flashing furnaces. An odour of iron and cinders poisoned the air, and after some moments of contemplation which seemed to draw them closer together, Mr. Lennox said:

‘There is no doubt that the view is very grand, but it is tantalizing to have those hills before your eyes when you are shut up in a red brick oven. How fresh and cool they look! What wouldn’t you give to be straying about in those fresh woods far away?’

Kate looked at Mr. Lennox with ravished eyes; his words had flooded her mind with a thousand forgotten dreams. She felt she liked him better for what he had said, and she murmured as if half ashamed:

‘I’ve never been out of Hanley. I’ve never seen the sea, and when I was a child I used to fancy that the fairies lived beyond those hills; even now I can’t help imagining that the world is quite different over there. Here it is all brick, but in novels they never speak of anything but gardens and fields.’

‘Never seen the sea! Well, there isn’t much to see in it,’ Mr. Lennox said, laughing at the pun. ‘When you were a little girl you used to come here to play, I suppose?’

‘Yes, sir; I was born over in one of those cottages.’

Mr. Lennox, without knowing whether to look

sorry or sentimental, listened patiently to Kate, who, proud of being able to show him anything, drew his attention to the different points of view. The white gables that could just be distinguished in the large dark masses of trees was Bucknell Rectory. The fragment of the cliff on the top of the highest ridge half-way up the sky was Watley Rocks; then came Western Coyney, the plains of Standon, and far away in a blue mist the outlines of the Wéver Hills. But Mr. Lennox did not seem very much interested; the sun was too hot for him, and in the first pause of the conversation he asked Kate which way she was going. He had to get on to the theatre, and he asked her if she would show him the way there.

‘You can’t do better than to go down Market Street; but if you like I will direct you.’

‘I shall be so glad if you will; but Market Street—I think you said Market Street?’ That is just the way I’ve come.’

Market Street was where people connected with the theatre generally lived, and Kate knew at once he had been looking for lodgings; but she was ashamed to ask him, and they walked on for some time without speaking. But every moment the silence became more irritating, and at last, determined to know the worst, she said, ‘I suppose you were looking for lodgings; all the theatre people put up in that street.’

Mr. Lennox flinched before this direct question.

‘Why, no, not exactly; I was calling on some friends; but as you say, some of the profession live in the street, and now you mention it, I suppose I shall have to find some new diggings.’

'I'm sorry, sir, very sorry,' said Kate, looking up into the big blue eyes. 'I ought not to have come down; you are, of course, master in your own rooms.'

'Oh, it wasn't your fault; I could live with you for ever. You mustn't think I want to change. If you could only guarantee that your mother-in-law will keep out of my way.'

Kate felt at that moment that she would guarantee anything that would prevent Mr. Lennox from leaving her house.

'Oh, I don't think there will be any difficulty about that,' she said eagerly. 'I'll bring your breakfast and dinner up, and you are out nearly all day.'

'Very well, then, and I'll promise not to bring home any friends,' he added gallantly.

'But I'm afraid you'll be very lonely, sir.'

'I'll have you to talk to sometimes.'

Kate made no answer, but they both felt that the words implied more than they actually meant, and they remained silent, like people who had come to some important conclusion. Then after a long pause, and without any transition, Mr. Lennox spoke of the heat of the weather and of the harm it was likely to do their business at the theatre. She asked him what he thought of Hanley. Mr. Lennox smiled through his faint moustache and said the red brick hurt his eyes.

Kate did not feel quite satisfied with this last observation, and spoke of the pretty places there were about the town. Pointing down a red perspective backed by the usual hills, she told him that Trentham, the Duke of Sutherland's place, was over there.

'What, over those hills? That must be miles away.'

'Oh, not so far as that. Hanley doesn't reach to there. The country is beautiful, once you get past Stoke. I went once to see the Duke's place, and we had tea in the inn. That was the only time I was ever really in the country, and even then we were never quite out of sight of the factories. Still, it was very nice.'

'And who were you with?'

'Oh, with my husband.'

'He's an invalid, isn't he?'

'Well, I'm afraid he suffers very much at times, but he's often well enough.'

The conversation again came to a pause, and both thought of how happy they would be were they taking tea together at the inn at Trentham.

But they were now in the centre of the town, close to the Town Hall, a stupid, square building with two black cannon on either side of the door. Opposite was a great shop with 'Commercial House' written across the second story in gold letters. Bright carpets and coarse goods were piled about the doorway; and from these two houses Piccadilly and Broad Street, its continuation, ran down an incline, and Church Street branched off, giving the town the appearance of a two-pronged fork.

All was red brick blazing under a blue sky without a cloud in it; the red brick that turns to purple; and all the roofs were scarlet—red brick and scarlet tiles, and not a tree anywhere.

'You don't seem to have a tree in Hanley,' Mr. Lennox said.

'I don't think there are many,' she answered, and they gazed at the bald rotundities of the pottery ovens.

He had never seen a town before composed entirely of brick and iron. A town of work; a town in which the shrill scream of the steam tram as it rolled solemnly up the incline seemed to be man's cry of triumph over vanquished nature.

After looking about him, Mr. Lennox said, 'What I object to in the town is that there's nothing to do. And it's so blazing hot; for goodness' sake let us get under the shadow of a wall.'

Kate smiled, and as they crossed over they both wiped their faces.

'There are the potteries,' she said, referring to Mr. Lennox's complaint that 'there was nothing to do in the town. 'Everybody that comes to Hanley goes to see them; but the best are in Stoke.'

'I'm sure I'm not going to Stoke to see potteries,' he answered decisively, 'but if there are any at Hanley I dare say I shall turn in some afternoon. I've heard some of our people say they are worth seeing. But,' he added, as if a sudden thought had struck him, 'I might go now; I've nothing to do for the next couple of hours. How far are the nearest?'

Kate told him that Powell and Jones's works were close by in the High Street. She pointed out the way, but, failing to make Mr. Lennox understand her, she consented to go with him. He had a kind, soft manner of speaking which drew Kate towards him almost as if he had taken her in his arms, and it was astonishing how intimate they had grown in the last few minutes.

'It doesn't look very interesting,' he said, as they stopped before an archway and looked into a yard filled with straw and packing-cases.

'Yes it is, but you must see the different rooms. You must go up to the office and ask for permission to see the works.'

'I don't think I'd care to go by myself. Won't you come with me?'

Kate hesitated; she had very little to do at home, and could say that Mrs. Barnes had kept her waiting.

'Do come,' he said after a pause, during which he looked at her eagerly.

'Well, I should like to see the room where my mother used to work, but we mustn't stop too long. I shall be missed at home.' The matter being so arranged, they entered the yard, and Kate pointed out a rough staircase placed against the wall. 'You must go up there; the office is at the top. Ask for permission to see the works and I'll wait here for you.'

Half a dozen men were packing crockery into crates with spades, and as she watched them she remembered that she used to come to this yard with her mother's dinner, and stand wondering how they could pack the delf without breaking it. She remembered one afternoon particularly well; she had promised to be very good, and had been allowed to sit by her mother and watch her painting flowers that wound in and out and all about a big blue vase. She remembered how she was reproved for peeping over her neighbour's shoulder, and how proud she felt sitting among all the workwomen. She could recall

the smell of the paint and turpentine, and her grief when she was told that she was too delicate to learn painting, and was going to be put out to dressmaking. But that time was long ago; her mother was dead and she was married. Everything was changed or broken, as was that beautiful vase, probably. It astonished Kate to find herself thinking of these things. She had passed the High Street twenty times during the last six months without it even occurring to her to visit the old places, and when Mr. Lennox came back he noticed that there were tears in her eyes. He made no remark, but hastily explained that he had been told that there was a party just that minute gone on in front of them, and they were to catch them up.

‘This way, then,’ she said, pointing to a big archway.

‘Oh, I can’t run; don’t be in such a hurry,’ said Mr. Lennox, panting.

Kate laughed, and admitted that the heat was great. Out of a sky burnt almost to white the glare descended into the narrow brick-yards. The packing straw seemed ready to catch fire; the heaps of wet clay, which two boys were shovelling, smoked, emitting as it did so an unpleasant wet odour. On passing the archway they caught sight of three black coats and three soft hats like the one Mr. Lennox wore.

‘Oh!’ said Kate, stopping, disappointed, ‘we’ll have to go round with those clergymen.’

‘What does that matter? It will be amusing to listen to them.’

• ‘But mother knows all of them.’

'They must be strangers in the town or they wouldn't be visiting the potteries, surely.'

'I hadn't thought of that; I suppose you're right,' and hastening a little, they overtook the party that was being shown round. The Dissenting clergymen looked askance at Mr. Lennox, and as he showed them into a small white cell the guide said, 'You're in plenty of time, sir; these are the snagger-makers.'

Two men were beating a heap of wet clay in order to insure a something in the bakery which nobody understood, but which the guide took some trouble to explain. The clergymen pressed forward to listen. Mr. Lennox wiped his face, and they were then hurried into a second cell, where unbaked dishes were piled all around upon shelves. It was said to be the dishmakers' place, and was followed by another and another room, all of which Mr. Lennox thought equally hot and uninteresting. He strove to escape from the guide, who drew him through the line of clergymen and made plain to him the mysteries of earthenware.

At last these preliminary departments were disposed of, and they were led to another part of the works. On their way thither they passed the ovens. These were scattered over the ground like beehives in a garden. Lennox patted their round sides, approvingly saying that they reminded him of oyster boys in a pantomime, and might be introduced into the next Christmas show. Kate looked at him, her eyes full of wonder. She could not understand how he could think of such things.

In the printing-room they listened to the guide,

who apparently considered it important that clergymen, actor, and dressmaker should understand the different processes the earthenware had to pass through before it was placed on toilet or breakfast table. Smoking flannels hung on lines all around, and like laundresses at their tubs, four or five women washed the printed paper from the plates. A man in a paper cap bent over a stove, and as if dissatisfied with the guide's explanation of his work, broke out into a wearisome flow of technical details. At the other end of this vast workroom there was a line of young girls who cut the printed matter out of sheets of paper, the scissors running in and out of flowers, tendrils, and little birds without ever injuring one. The clergymen watched the process, delighted, while Lennox stepped behind Kate and whispered that he had just caught the tall Dissenter winking at the dark girl on the right, which was not true, and was invented for the sake of the opportunity it gave him of breathing on Kate's neck—a lead up to the love-scene which he had now decided was to come off as soon as he should find himself alone with her.

They passed through a brick alley with a staircase leading to a platform built like a ship's deck, and went on through a series of rooms till they came to a place almost as hot as a Turkish bath, filled with unbaked plates and dishes. The smell of wet clay drying in steam diffused from underneath was very unpleasant, and caused one of the ministers to cough violently, whereupon the guide explained that the platenmakers' departments were considered the most unhealthy of any in the works; the people

who worked there, he said, usually suffered from what is known as the potter's asthma. This interested Kate, and she delayed the guide with questions as to how the potter's asthma differed from the ordinary form of the disease, and when their little procession was again put in motion she told Mr. Lennox how her husband was affected, and the nights she had spent watching at his side. But although Lennox listened attentively, she could not help thinking that he seemed rather glad than otherwise that her husband was an invalid. The unkind way in which he spoke of sick people shocked her, and she opposed the opinion that a person in bad health was a disgusting object, while Lennox took advantage of the occasion to whisper into her ears that she was far too pretty a woman for an asthmatic husband; and, encouraged by her blushes, he even hazarded a few coarse jokes anent the poor husband's deficiencies. 'How could a man kiss if he couldn't breathe, for if there was a time when breath was essential, according to him, it was when four lips meet.

No one had ever spoken to her in this way before, and had she known how to do so she would have resented his familiarities. Once their hands met. The contact caused her a thrill; she put aside the unbaked plate they were examining and said: 'We'd better make haste or we shall lose them.'

The next two rooms were considered the most interesting they had been through; even the three clergymen lost something of their stolid manner and asked Lennox his opinion regarding the religious

character of Hanley, and if he were of their persuasion.

'What is that?' asked Lennox, affecting a comic innocence which he hoped would tickle Kate's fancy.

'We're Wesleyans,' said the minister.

'And I'm an actor; but, I beg your pardon, stage-managing's more my business,' news that seemed to cast a gloom over the faces of the ministers; and leaving them to make what they could of his reply, he drew Kate forward confidentially and pointed to an old man sitting straddle-legged on a high narrow table just on a line with the window. He was covered with clay; his forehead and beard were plastered with it, and before him was an iron plate, kept continually whirling by steam, which he could stop by a pressure of his foot. He squeezed a lump of clay into a long shape not unlike a tall ice, then, forcing it down into the shape of a batter-pudding, he hollowed it. Round and round went the clay, the hands forming it all the while, cleaning and smoothing until it came out a true and perfect jam pot, even to the little furrow round the top, which was given by a movement of the thumbs. He had been at work since seven in the morning, and the shelves round him were encumbered with the result of his labours. Everyone marvelled at his dexterity, until he was forgotten in the superior attractions of the succeeding room. This was the turning-house, and Lennox could not help laughing outright, so amusing did the scene appear to him. Women went dancing up and down on one leg, and at such regular intervals that they seemed absolutely like machines. They were at once the motive power and the feeders

of the different lathes. It was they who handed the men lumps of dry clay, which they turned into shapes. The strangeness of the spectacle gave rise to much comment. The clergymen were anxious to know if the constant jigging was injurious to health. Lennox inquired how much coin they made by their one-leg dancing. He spoke of their good looks, and this led him easily into the question of morals, a subject in which he was much interested. He wanted to know if this crowding together of the sexes could be effected without danger. Surely cases of seduction must occur occasionally. In answering him the guide betrayed a certain reticence of manner which encouraged Lennox to ask him if he really meant to say that nothing ever befell these young women who were working all day side by side with people of the other sex. Did their thoughts never wander from their work? The guide assured Mr. Lennox that there was no time to think of such nonsense in the factory, and, anxious to vindicate the honour of the establishment, he declared that any who took the smallest liberty with any female would be instantly dismissed from the works. The ministers listened approvingly, although they seemed to think the subject might have been avoided. Kate felt a little embarrassed, and Mr. Lennox watched a big, blonde-haired woman who smiled prettily and seemed quite conscious of her sex, notwithstanding the ludicrous bobbing up and down position she was in. With a courage that surprised herself Kate proposed that they should go on. She was beginning to feel uneasy at the time she had been away from home and certain that Mrs. Ede would be on the doorstep looking up and down

the street; and she could well imagine how cross Ralph would be if he heard she had been to the potteries with Mr. Lennox. She felt very sorry for the one and a little resentful towards the other, but the sentimental desire to see the painting-room where her mother used to work prevailed, and with her heart full of recollections she followed the party to the ovens.

Their way thither led them around the building, and they passed through many workrooms. These were generally clean, airy spaces, with big rafters and whitewashed walls. Sometimes a bunch of violets, a book, or a newspaper lying on the table, suggested an absent owner, and a refined countenance was sought for in the different groups of women. There was also a difference in the hats and shawls, and it was easy to tell which belonged to the young girls, which to the mothers of families. Everyone looked healthy and contented. All were nice-looking, as Lennox continued to assert, and all worked industriously at their numberless employments, one of the most curious of which consisted in knocking the roughness off the finished earthenware.

A dozen women sat in a circle; above them and around them were piles of dinner-services of all kinds. Each held with one hand a piece of crockery on her knees, whilst with a chisel she chopped away at it as if it could not by any possibility be broken. As may easily be imagined, the noise in this warehouse was bewildering.

Through this room and others, up and down many narrow staircases, the visiting party went, the guide leading, the three black clergymen following, Kate

lingering behind with Mr. Lennox until they came to the ovens. The entrance was from an immense corridor, prolonged by shadow and divided down the middle by presses full of drying earthenware, the smell of which was not, however, as strong as in the platemakers' place, and the difference was noticed by the clergyman with the cough. He said he was not affected to nearly the same extent.

From time to time the visitors had to give way to men who marched in single file carrying what seemed to be huge cheeses, but the guide explained that within these were cups, saucers, bowls, and basins, and men mounted on ladders piled these yellow tubs up the walls of the ovens. When the visitors had peeped into the huge interior, they were conducted to the furnaces; and these were set in the oven's inner shell, which made a narrow circular passage slanting inwards as it ascended like the neck of a champagne bottle. The fires glared so furiously that they suggested many impious thoughts to Lennox, and he proposed to ask the ministers if there were any warmer corners in hell, and was with difficulty dissuaded by Kate, about whose waist he had passed his arm. His constant whispering in her ear, which had at first amused her, now irritated and annoyed her; other emotions filled her mind with a vague tumult, and she longed to be left to think in peace. She begged of him to keep quiet, and as they crossed one of the yards she asked the guide if he could not go straight to the painting-room. He replied that there was a regular order to be observed, and insisted on marching them through two more rooms, and explaining fully three or four more

processes. Then, after begging them to be careful and to hold the rail, he led them up a high staircase. The warning caused Kate a thrill, for she remembered that every step of this staircase had been a terror to her mother.

The room itself proved a little disappointing. The tables were not arranged in quite the same way, and these alterations deprived her of the emotions she had expected. Still it gave her a great deal of pleasure to point out to Mr. Lennox where her mother used to work. •

But to find the exact spot was not by any means easy. There were upwards of a hundred young women sitting on benches, leaning over huge tables covered with unfinished pottery. Each held in her hand a plate, bowl, or vase, on which she executed some design. The clergy showed more interest than they had hitherto done, and as they leaned to and fro examining the work, one of them discovered the something *Guardian*, a Wesleyan organ, on one of the tables, and hailing his fellows, they began to interview the proprietor. But the guide said they had to visit the store-rooms, and forced them away from their 'lamb.'

Ridges of vases, mounds of basins and jugs, terraces of plates, formed masses of sickly white, through which rays of light were caught and sent dancing. Along the wall on the left-hand side presses were overcharged with dusty tea-services. On the right were square grey windows, under which the convex sides of salad-bowls sparkled in the sun; and from rafter to rafter, in garlands and clusters like grapes, hung gilded mugs bearing devices suitable for chil-

dren, and down the middle of the floor a terrace was built of dinner-plates.

Two rooms away, a large mound of chamber-pots formed an astonishing background, and against all this white and grey effacement the men, who stood on high ladders dusting the crockery came out like strange black climbing insects.

The clergyman said it was very interesting, and just as he did everything else the guide explained the system of storing employed by the firm; how the crockery was packed, and how the men would soon be working only three days a week on account of the American tariff. But he was not much listened to. Everyone was now tired, and the clergymen, who, since the discovery of the newspaper, had been showing signs that they regarded their visit to the potteries as ended, pulled out their watches and whispered that their time was up. The guide told them that there were only a few more rooms to visit, but they said that they must be off, and demanded to be conducted to the door. This request was an embarrassing one; it was against the rules ever to leave visitors when going the rounds. The guide had, therefore, either to conduct the whole party to the door or transgress his orders. After a slight hesitation, influenced no doubt by a conversation he had had with Lennox, in which mention was made of tickets for the theatre, he decided to take the responsibility on himself, and asked that gentleman if he would mind waiting a few minutes with his lady while the religious gentlemen were being shown the way out. Lennox assented with readiness, and the three black figures and the guide disappeared a moment after be-

hind the bedroom utensils. After an anxious glance round Lennox looked at Kate, who, at that moment, was gathering to herself all the recollections that the place evoked. She knew the room she was in well, for she used to pass through it daily with her mother's dinner, and she remembered how in her childhood she wondered how big the world must be to hold enough people to use such thousands of cups and saucers. There used to be a blue tea-service in the far corner, and she had often lingered to imagine a suitable parlour for it and for her dream husband. One day she had torn her frock coming up the stairs, and was terribly scolded; another time Mr. Powell, attracted by her black curls, had stopped to speak to her, and he had given her as a present one of the children's mugs—one exactly like those hanging over her head. She had treasured it a long time, but at last it was broken. It seemed that all things belonging to her had to be broken; her dreams were made in crockery.

But as Kate looked into the past she became gradually conscious of a voice whispering to her.

‘How odd it is that you should never have thought of revisiting this place until you met me.’

She raised her eyes, and, her look seeming to tell him that this was his moment, he turned to see if they were watched. At their feet a pile of plates and teacups slept in a broad flood of sunlight, and three rooms away the boys on high ladders dusted the mugs.

‘What a pretty child you must have been! I can fancy you with your black hair falling about your shoulders. Had I known you then, I should have

taken you in my arms and kissed you. Do you think you would have liked me to have kissed you ?'

She raised her eyes again, and a vague feeling, of how nice, how kind he was, rushed through her, and perceiving still more clearly that this moment was his moment, Lennox affected to examine a ring on her finger. The warm pressure of his hand caused her to start, and she would have put him from her, but his voice calmed her.

'Ah!' he said, 'had I known you then, I should have been in love with you.'

Kate closed her eyes, and abandoned herself to an ineffable sentiment of weakness, of ravishment; and then, imagining that she was his, Lennox took her in his arms and kissed her rudely. But quick, angry thoughts rushed to her head at the first movement of his arms, and obeying an impulse in contradiction to her desire, she shook herself free, and looked at him vexed and humiliated.

'Oh, how very cross we are; and about a kiss, just a tiny, wee kiss!'

She stood staring at him, only half hearing what he said, irritated against him and herself.

'I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you,' he continued after a pause, for Kate's manner puzzled him; 'I love you too well.'

'Love me?' she cried, astonished, but with nevertheless a tone of interrogation in her voice. 'Why, you never saw me till the other day.'

'I loved you the first moment; I assure you I did.'

Kate looked at him imploringly, as if beseeching him not to deceive her. There was an honest

frankness in his big blue eyes, and his face said as clearly as words, 'I think you a deuced pretty woman, and I'm sùre I could love you very much,' and recognizing this, Kate remained silent.

And thus encouraged, Mr. Lennox attempted to renew his intentions. But actions have to be pre-faced by words, and he commenced by declaring that when a man would give the whole world for a kiss, it was not to be expected that he would resist trying for one, and he strove to think of the famous love scene in *The Lady of Lyons*. But it was years since he had played the part, and he could only murmur something about reading no books but lovers' books, singing no songs but lovers' songs. The guide would be back in a few minutes, and, inspired by Kate's pale face, he came to the conclusion that it would be absurd to let her go without kissing her properly.

He was a strong man, but Kate had now really lost her temper, and struggled vigorously, determined he should not gain his end. Three times his lips had rested on her cheek, once he managed to kiss her on the chin, but he could not reach her mouth: she always succeeded in twisting her face away, and not liking to be beaten he put forth all his strength. She staggered backwards and placed one hand on his throat, and with the other strove to catch at his moustache; she had given it a wrench that had brought tears into his eyes, but now he was pinioning her; she could see his big face approaching, and summoning up all her strength she strove to get away, but that moment, happening to tread on her skirt, her feet slipped. He made a

desperate effort to sustain her, but her legs had gone between his.

The crash was tremendous. A pile of plates three feet high was sent spinning, a row of salad-bowls was over, and then with a heavy stagger Mr. Lennox went down into a dinner-service, sending the soup-tureen rolling gravely into the next room.

A feeling at first prevailed that some serious accident had happened, but when Kate rose, pale and trembling, from the litter of a bedroom set, and Lennox was lifted out of the dinner-service with nothing apparently worse than a cut hand, a murmur of voices asking the cause of the disaster was heard. But before a word could be said the guide came running towards them. He declared that he would lose his place, and spoke vaguely to those around him of the necessity of suppressing the fact that he had left visitors alone in the storerooms.

Lennox, on the other hand, was very silent. He had evidently received some bad cuts, of which he did not speak. He put his hand to his legs and felt them doubtfully. There was a large gash in his right hand, from which he picked a piece of debris, and as he tied the wound up with a pocket-handkerchief he partly quieted the expostulating guide by assuring him that everything would be paid for. And taking Kate's arm, he hobbled out of the place.

The suddenness and excitement of the accident had for the moment quenched her angry feelings, and, overwhelmed with pity for the poor wounded hand, she thought of nothing but getting him to a doctor. Indeed, it was not until she heard him telling Mr. Powell in the office that he was subject to fits, and

•

•

that in striving to hold him up the lady had fallen too, that she remembered how he had behaved, how he had disgraced her. But her mouth was closed, and she listened in amazement to him as he invented detail after detail with surprising dexterity. He did not even hesitate to call in the evidence of the guide, who, in his own interests, was obliged to assent; and when Mr. Powell inquired after the three clergymen, Lennox said that they had left them in the yard after visiting the ovens.

Mr. Powell listened with a look of pity on his face, and began to tell of a poor brother of his who was likewise subject to fits, and, possibly influenced by the remembrance, refused to receive any remuneration for the broken crockery, saying that to a firm like theirs a few plates more or less was of no importance.

And this matter being settled, Lennox hobbled away, leaving a little pool of blood on the floor of the office. She had to lend him her handkerchief, his was now saturated—to tie round his hand: he confessed to a bad cut in the leg, saying he could feel the blood trickling down into his boot, but did not think he needed a doctor. ‘A bit of sticking-plaster, dear; I’ll get some at the apothecary’s. Which is the way?’

‘Take the first turn to the right, and you’re in Church Street; but there may be bits of the delf in the wound?’

‘I shall see to that. But how strong you are; you’re like a lion. You mustn’t struggle like that next time.’

At the suggestion that there was going to be a

next time Kate's face clouded, but she was so alarmed for his safety that it was only for a moment. She had hardly noticed that he called her 'dear'; he used the word so naturally and simply that it touched her with swift pleasure, and was as soon lost in a crowd of conflicting emotions.

The man was coarse and largely sensual, but each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was, in a word, human, and this attracted all that was human in her.

V

ON leaving Mr. Lennox Kate walked slowly along the streets, recalling every word he had said, feeling his breath upon her cheek and his blue eyes looking into hers more distinctly in recollection than when he had held her in his arms. She walked immersed in recollections, every one clear and precise, experiencing a sort of supersensual gratification, one she had never known before. Being a child of the people, his violence had not impressed her, and she murmured to herself every now and then:

'Poor fellow, what a fall he had! I hope he didn't hurt himself.'

By turns she thought of things totally different—of Hender, of the little girls, who would regret her absence from the workroom, and it was not without surprise that she caught herself wishing suddenly they were her own children. The wish was only

momentary, but it was the first time a desire for motherhood had ever troubled her.

It amused her to think of their smiling faces, and to make sure of their smiles she entered a shop and bought a small packet of sweetstuff, and with the paper in her hand continued her walk home. The cheap prints in a newspaper shop delayed her, and the workmen who were tearing up the road forced her to consider how a suspension of traffic would interfere with her business. She was now in Broad Street, and when she raised her eyes she saw her own house. A new building high and narrow, it stood in the main street at the corner of a lane, the ground-floor windows filled with light goods, and underneath them black hats trimmed with wings and tails of birds. There were also children's dresses, and a few neckties trimmed with white lace.

As she entered the shop Mrs. Ede, who was in the front kitchen, cried, 'Well, is that you, Kate? Where have you been? I waited dinner an hour for you; and how tired you look!'

In her present state of mind Mrs. Ede was the last person Kate cared to meet.

'What's the matter, my dear? Aren't you well? Shall I get you a glass of water?'

'Oh no, mother; I'm all right. Can't you see that I'm only very hot?'

'But where have you been? I waited dinner an hour for you. It's past two o'clock!'

Kate did not know how to account for her absence from home, but after a pause she answered, thinking of Mr. Lennox as she spoke, 'Mrs. Barnes kept me waiting above an hour trying her dress on, and then

I was so done up with night-watching and sewing that I thought I'd go for a walk,' and after wiping her weary hot face she asked her mother-in-law if many people had been in the shop that morning.

'Well, yes, half a dozen or more,' Mrs. Ede answered, and began to recount the different events of the morning. Mrs. White had bought one of the aprons; she said she hadn't seen the pattern before; a stranger had taken another; and Miss Sargent had called and wanted to know how much it would cost to remake her blue dress.

'Oh, I know; she wants me to reline the skirt and put new trimming on the bodice for seven and sixpence; we can do without her custom. What then?'

'And then—ah! I was forgetting—Mrs. West came in to tell us that her friend Mrs. Wood, the bookseller's wife, you know, up the street, was going to be confined, and would want some baby-linen, and she recommended her here.'

'Did you see nobody else?'

'Well, yes, a young man who bought half a dozen pocket-handkerchiefs; I let him have the half-dozen for four shillings; and I sold a pink necktie to one of the factory hands over the way.'

'Why, mother, you've done a deal of business, and I'm glad about the baby-linen. We've a lot in stock, and it hasn't gone off well. I don't know Mrs. Wood, but it's very kind of Mrs. West to recommend us; and how has Hender been getting on with the skirt?'

'Well, I must say she has been working very well; she was here at half-past eight, and she did not

stop away above, three-quarters of an hour for dinner.'

'I'm glad of that, for I was never so backward in my life with my work, what with Ralph being ill and Mrs.——'

Kate tried here to stop herself. The conversation had so far been an agreeable one, and she did not wish to spoil it by alluding to a subject on which there was no likelihood of their agreeing. But her mother-in-law, guessing that Kate was thinking of the mummer, said, 'Yes, I wanted to talk to you about that. He hasn't sent anyone to take away his things, and he didn't even speak when I took him up his breakfast this morning.'

'I don't think Mr. Lennox is leaving us,' she answered, after a pause. 'I thought it was settled last night that he was to be told that he mustn't bring friends home after eleven o'clock at night. When I see him I'll speak to him about it.'

'The house is yours, deary. If you're satisfied, I am.' And Kate walked into the kitchen, and when she had finished her dinner she went upstairs to see Ralph, whom Mrs. Ede declared to be much better. On passing the workroom the door opened suddenly and the bright faces of the little girls darted out.

'Oh, is that you, Mrs. Ede? How we've missed you all the morning!' Annie cried.

'And Miss Hender has been so busy that she had to get me to help her with the skirt, and I did a great long piece myself without a mistake. Didn't I, Miss Hender?'

'I'm going to see my husband,' said Kate, smiling;

'but I shall be down presently, and I've bought something for you.'

'Oh, what is it?' cried Annie excitedly.

'You shall see presently.'

Ralph was lying still in bed, propped up in his usual attitude, with his legs tucked under him.

'Don't you think we might open something?' she said, as she sat down by the bedside; 'and your sheets want changing.'

'Oh, if you've only come in to turn everything upside-down, you might as well have stayed away.' He spoke with difficulty, in a thin wheeze.

'I think the pills did me good last night,' he said, after a pause; and then added, laughing as much as his breath would allow him, 'and what a rage mother was in! But tell me, what were they doing downstairs? Were there any ladies there? I was too bad to think of anything.'

'Yes, some of the ladies from the theatre,' Kate answered. 'But I don't think mother had a right to kick up all the row she did.'

'And it just came in upon her prayers,' Ralph replied, smiling.

Although cross-grained, Mr. Ede was not always an unpleasant man, and often in sudden flashes of affection the kind heart of his mother was recognizable in him.

'You mustn't laugh, Ralph,' said Kate, looking aside, for the comic side of the question had suddenly dawned upon her.

But their hilarity was not of long endurance. Ralph was seized with a fit of coughing, and when this was over he lay back exhausted. At last he said:

'But where have you been all the day? We've been wondering what had become of you.'

The question, although not put unkindly, annoyed Kate. 'One would think I'd come back from a long journey,' she said to herself. 'It's just as Hender says; if I'm out half an hour more than my time everyone is, as they say, "wondering what has become of me."'" Assuming an air of indifference, she told him that Mrs. Barnes kept her a long time, and that she went for a walk afterwards.

'I'm glad of that,' he said. 'You wanted a walk after being shut up with me three nights running And what a time you must have had of it! But tell me what you've been doing in the shop.'

She told him that 'mother' had sold all the aprons, and he said: 'I knew they'd sell. I told you so, didn't I?'

'You did, dear,' said Kate, seeking to satisfy him; 'but you mustn't talk so much; you'll make yourself bad again.'

'But are you going?'

'I've been out so long that I've a lot to do; but I'll come back and see you in the evening.'

'Well, then, kiss me before you go.'

As she kissed him, she remembered the struggle in the potteries, and it appeared strange to her that she should now be giving as a matter of course what she had refused an hour ago. She had always complied with the ordinances of the marriage state without passion or revolt, but now it disgusted her to kiss her husband, and as she stepped into the passage she almost walked into Mr. Lennox's room unconsciously, without knowing what she was doing,

beguiled by the natural sentiment that a woman feels in the room of a man she is interested in. Hoping that Mrs. Ede had not yet set everything straight, she went on to make sure. Slippers and boots lay about; the portmanteau yawned wide open, with some soiled shirts on the top; a pair of trousers trailed from a chair on the floor. Annoyed at the mother's negligence, Kate hung the trousers on the door, placed the slippers tidily by his bedside, and put away the soiled linen. But in doing so she could not refrain from glancing at the contents of the portmanteau. She saw many of the traces which follow those who frequent women's society. The duchess works a pair of slippers for her lover, and the chorus-girl does the same. The merchant's wife, as she holds the loved hand under the ledge of her box at the theatre, clasps the ring she had given; the rich widow opposite has a jewel-case in her pocket which will presently be sent round to the stage-door for the tenor, who is now thinking of his high B flat.

Under the shirts Kate found a pair of slippers, a pin-cushion, and the inevitable ring. But there were other presents more characteristic of the man: there was a bracelet, a scent-bottle, and two pots of *pâté de foie gras* wrapped up in a lace-trimmed chemise. Kate examined everything, but without being able to adduce any conclusion beyond a vague surmise that Lennox lived in a different world from hers. The *foie gras* suggested delicacy of living, the chemise immorality, the bottle of scent refinement of taste; the bracelet she could make nothing of. Prosaic and vulgar as were all these articles, in the

dressmaker's imagination they became both poetized and purified. An infinite sadness, that she could not explain, rose up through her mind, and, staring vaguely at the pious exhortations hung on the wall—'Thou art my will,' 'Thou art my hope'—she thought of Mr. Lennox's wounded legs, and asked herself if his bed were soft, and if she could do anything to make him more comfortable. It vexed her to see that he had chosen to use the basin-stand made out of a triangular board set in a corner instead of the proper one, where she had hung two clean towels; and it was not until she remembered the little girls that she was able to tear herself away.

'What have you got for us?' said four red lips as Kate entered.

'Oh, you must guess,' she replied, taking a chair, and bidding Miss Hender good-morning.

'An apple?' cried Annie.

'No.'

'An orange?' cried Lizzie.

Kate shook her head, and at the sight of their bright looks she felt her spirits return to her.

'No, it is sweetstuff.'

'Brandy balls?'

'No.'

'Toffee.'

'Yes; Annie has guessed right,' said Kate, as she divided the toffee equally between the two.

'And do I get nothing for guessing right?' said Annie doubtfully.

'Oh, for shame, Annie! I didn't think you were greedy!'

'I think I ought to have the most,' replied Lizzie

in self-defence. 'Had it not been for me Miss Hender would never have got through her skirt. I helped you famously, didn't I, Miss Hender?'

The assistant nodded an impatient assent and gazed at her mistress curiously. But while the children were present, she could only watch her employer's face, and strive to read it.

And unconscious of the scrutiny, Kate sat idly talking of the skirt that was finished. The clicking of the needles sounded as music in her ears, and she abandoned herself to all sorts of soft and floating reveries. Not for years had she known what it was to take her fill of rest; and her thoughts swayed, now on one side and then on the other, as voluptuously as flowers, and hid themselves in the luxurious current of idleness which lapped loosely around her.

The afternoon passed delightfully, full of ease and pleasant quiet, Hender telling them how *Les Cloches* had gone the night before: of Miss Leslie's spirited singing, of the cider song, of Joe Mortimer's splendid miser scene, of Bret's success in the barcarole. So eagerly did she speak of them that one would have thought she herself had received the applause she described. Kate listened dreamily, and the little girls sucked toffee, staring the while with interested eyes.

VI

BUT Kate could not manage to see Mr. Lennox that evening or the next. He came in very late, and was away before she was down. She tormented herself trying to find reasons for his absence, and it

pained her to think that it might be because the breakfasts were not to his taste. It seemed strange to her, too, that when a man cared to walk about the potteries with a woman, and talked as nicely as he had done to her, that he should not take the trouble to come and see her, if only to say good-morning; and in a thousand different ways did these thoughts turn and twist in Kate's brain, as she sat sewing opposite Hender in the workroom. This young woman had made up her mind that there was something between the stage-manager and her employer, and it irritated her when Kate said she had not seen him for the last two days. Kate was not very successful either in extracting theatrical news from Hender. 'If she's going to be close with me, I'll show her that two can play at that game,' and she answered that she had not noticed any limp. But Mrs. Ede told Kate he limped so badly that she felt sure he must have met with an accident. Which was she to believe? Mother, of course; but feeling that only direct news of him would satisfy her, she waited next morning in the kitchen. But the trick was not successful; she was serving in the shop, and heard him leave by the side door. Whether he had done this on purpose to avoid her, or whether it was the result of chance, Kate passed the morning in considering. She had hitherto succeeded in completely ignoring their ridiculous fall amid the teacups, but the memory of it, now surged up in her mind; and certain coarse details that she had forgotten continued to recur to her with a singular persistency; deaf to Hender's conversation, she sat sullenly sewing, hating even to go down to the shop to attend when

Mrs. Ede called from below that there was a customer waiting.

About three o'clock Mrs. Ede's voice was heard.

'Kate, come down; there is someone in the shop.'

Passing round the counter, she found herself face to face with a well-dressed woman.

'I was recommended here by Mrs. West,' the lady said, after a slight hesitation, 'to buy' a set of baby clothes.'

'Is it for a new-born infant?' Kate asked, putting on her shop airs.

'Well, the baby is not born yet, but I hope soon will be.'

'Oh, I beg pardon,' said Kate, casting a rapid glance in the direction of the lady's waist.

The baby clothes were kept in a box under the counter, and in a few moments Kate reappeared with a bundle of flannels.

'You will find these of the very best quality; will you feel the warmth of this; ma'am?' she said, spreading out something that looked like two large towels.

The lady seemed satisfied with the quality, but from her manner of examining the strings Kate judged she was at her first confinement, and with short phrases and quick movements proceeded to explain how the infant was to be laid in the middle, and how the tapes were to be tied across.

'And you will want a hood and cloak? We have some very nice ones at two pounds ten; but perhaps you would not like to give so much?'

Without replying to this question, the lady asked to see the articles referred to, and then, beneath the men's shirts that hung just above their heads, the

two women talked with many genuine airs of mystery and covert subtlety. The lady spoke of her fears, of how much she wished the next fortnight was over, of her husband, of how long she had been married. She was Mrs. Wood, the stationer's wife in Piccadilly. Kate said she knew her customer's shop perfectly, and assumed a sad expression when in her turn she was asked if she had any children. On her replying in the negative, Mrs. Wood said, with a sigh of foreboding, that people were possibly just as well without them.

It was at this moment that Mr. Lennox entered, and Kate tried to sweep away and to hide up the things that were on the counter. Mrs. Wood was mildly embarrassed, and with a movement of retiring she attempted to resume the conversation.

'Very well, Mrs. Ede,' she said; 'I quite agree with you—and I'll call again about those pocket-handkerchiefs.'

But Kate, in her anxiety not to lose a chance of doing a bit of business, foolishly replied:

'Yes, but about those baby clothes—shall I send them, Mrs. Wood?'

Mrs. Wood murmured something inaudible in reply, and as she sidled and backed out of the shop she bumped against Mr. Lennox.

He lifted his big hat and strove to make way for her, but he had to get into a corner to allow her to pass out, and then, still apologizing, he took a step forwards, and leaning on the counter, said in a hurried voice:

'I've been waiting to see you for the last two days. Where have you been hiding yourself?'

The unexpected question disconcerted Kate, and instead of answering him coldly and briefly, as she had intended, said :

‘Why, here; where did you expect me to be? But you’ve been out ever since,’ she added simply.

‘It wasn’t my fault—the business I’ve had to do! I was in London yesterday, and only got back last night in time for the show. There was talk of our boss drying up, but I think it’s all right. I’ll tell you about that another time. I want you to come to the theatre to-morrow night. Here are some tickets for the centre circle. I’ll come and sit with you when I get the curtain up, and we’ll be able to talk.’

The worm does not easily realize the life of the fly, and Kate did not understand. The rapidly stated facts bewildered her, and she could only say, in answer to his again repeated question :

‘Oh, I should like it so much, but it is impossible; if my mother-in-law heard of it I don’t know what she would say.’

‘Well, then, come to-night; but no, confound it! I shall be busy all to night. Hayes, our acting manager, has been drunk for the last three days; he can’t even make up the returns. No, no; you must come to-morrow night. Come with Hender; she’s one of the dressers. I’ll make that all right; you can tell her so from me. Will you promise to come?’

‘I should like it so much; but what excuse can I give for being out till half-past ten at night?’

‘You needn’t stay till then; you can leave before

the piece is half over. Say you went out for a walk.'

The most ingenious and complete fiction that Mr. Lennox's inventive brain might have worked out would not have appeased Kate's fears so completely as the simple suggestion of a walk, and her face lit up with a glow of intelligence as she remembered how successfully she had herself made use of the same excuse.

'Then you'll come?' he said, taking her look for an answer.

'I'll try,' she replied, still hesitating.

'Then that's all right,' he murmured, pressing two or three pieces of paper into her hands. 'I've been thinking of you a great deal.'

Kate smiled slowly, and a slight flush for a moment illuminated the pale olive complexion.

'I dreamt that we were going up to London together, and that your head was lying on my shoulder, and it was so nice and pleasant, and when I woke up I was disappointed.'

Kate shivered a little, and drew back as if afraid; and in the pause which ensued Mr. Lennox remembered an appointment.

'I must be off now,' he said, 'there's no help for it; but you won't disappoint me, will you? The doors open at half-past six. If you're there early I may be able to see you before the piece begins.'

And with a grand lift of the hat the actor hurried away, leaving Kate to examine the three pieces of paper he had given her.

It was clearly impossible for her to go to the theatre without her assistant finding it out; she

must confide in Hender, who would be astonished, no doubt. And she was not wrong^f in her surmise; the news produced first an astonished stare, and then a look of satisfaction to be read: 'Well, you are coming to your senses at last.' Kate would have liked no more to be said on the subject, but the fact that her employer was going to meet Mr. Lennox at the theatre was not sufficient for Hender; she must needs question Kate how this change had come about in her. 'Was she really spoons on the actor?' At these words Kate, who wished to leave everything vague, the facts as well as her conception of them, declared that she would rather not go to the theatre at all, if such remarks were to be made.

Whereupon Miss Hender took a view less carnal, and the two women discussed how old Mrs. Ede might be given the slip. The idea of the walk was not approved of; it was too simple; but on this point Kate would take no advice, although she accepted the suggestion that she was to go upstairs, and under the pretext of changing her petticoat, should fold her hat into her mantle and tie the two behind her just as she would a bustle; an ingenious device, but difficult to put into practice.

Ralph was out of bed, and, having been deprived of speech for more than a week, he followed Kate into the back room, worrying her with questions about the shop, his health, his mother, and Mr. Lennox.

At five o'clock Mrs. Ede came up to say she was going up the town to do a little marketing for Sunday, and to ask Kate to come down to the front kitchen, where she could be in sight of the shop.

Miss Hender said nothing could have happened more fortunately, and, with many instructions as to where they should meet, she hurried away. But she was no sooner gone than Kate remembered she had no one to leave in charge of the shop. She should have asked one of the apprentices, but she hadn't, and would have to turn the key in the door and leave her mother-in-law to come in by the side way. Ralph would open to her; it couldn't be helped. Mr. Lennox was going away to-morrow; she must see him.

At that moment her mantle caused her some uneasiness; it didn't seem to hang well, and it was impossible to go to the theatre in the gloves that had been lying in her pocket for the last month. She took a pair of grey thread from the window, but while pulling them on her face changed expression. Was it Ralph coming down the staircase? There was nobody else in the house. Trembling, she waited for him to appear. Wheezing loudly, her husband dragged himself through the doorway.

'What—do you look so fri—frightened at? You did—didn't expect to see me, did you?'

'No, I didn't,' Kate answered as if in a dream.

'Feeling a good deal better, I thou—ght I would come down, but—but the stairs—have tried me.'

It was some time before he could speak again. At last he said:

'Where are you going?'

'I was just going for a walk.'

'I don't know how it is, but it seems to me that you're always out now; always coming in or going out; never in the shop. If it wasn't for my asthma

I don't think I'd ever be out of the shop, but women think of nothing but pleasure and ——,' a very rude word which she had never heard Ralph use before. But it might be that she was mistaken. Poor man! it was distressing to watch him gasping for breath. He leaned against the counter, and Kate begged him to let her help him upstairs, but he shook her off testily, saying that he understood himself better than anybody else did, and that he would look after the shop.

'You're going out? Well, go,' and she hurried away, hoping that a customer would come in, for his great delight was the shop. 'Attending on half a dozen customers will amuse him more than the play will amuse me,' she said to herself, and a smile rose to her lips, for she imagined him taking advantage of her absence to rearrange the window. 'But what can have brought him down?' Kate asked herself. 'Ah! that's it,' she said, for it had suddenly come into her mind that ever since she had told him of a certain sale of aprons and some unexpected orders for baby clothes he had often mentioned that the worst part of these asthmatic attacks was that they prevented his attendance in the shop. 'The shop is his pleasure just as the theatre is Hender's,' Kate said as she hurried up Piccadilly to the theatre, her heart in her mouth, for her time was up. Fearing to miss Hender, she raced along, dodging the passengers with quick turns and twists. 'It's my only chance of seeing him; he's going away to-morrow,' and she was living so intensely in her own imagination that she neither saw nor heeded anybody until she suddenly heard somebody calling.

after her, 'Kate! Kate! Kate!' She turned round and faced her mother-in-law.

'Where on earth are you going at that rate?' said Mrs. Ede, who carried a small basket on her arm.

'Only for a walk,' Kate replied in a voice dry with enforced calmness.

'Oh, for a walk; I'm glad of that, it will do you good. But which way are you going?'

'Anywhere round about the town. Up on the hill, St. John's Road.'

'How curious! I was just thinking of going back that way. There's a fruiterer's shop where you can get potatoes a penny a stone cheaper than you can here.'

If a thunderbolt had ruined Hanley before her eyes at that moment, it would not have appeared to her of such importance as this theft of her evening's pleasure. It was with difficulty that she saved herself from saying straight out that she was going to the theatre to see Mr. Lennox, and had a right to do so if she pleased.

'But I like walking fast,' she said; 'perhaps I walk too fast for you?'

'Oh no, not at all. My old legs are as good as your young ones. Kate, dear, what is the matter? Are you all right?' she said, seeing how cross her daughter-in-law was looking.

'Oh yes, I'm all right, but you do bother one so.'

This very injudicious phrase led to a demonstration of affection on the part of Mrs. Ede, and whatever were the chances of getting rid of her before, they

were now reduced to nothing. The strain on her nerves was at height during the first half of the walk, for during that time she knew that Mr. Lennox was expecting her; afterwards, while bargaining with the fruiterer in St. John's Road, she fell into despondency. Nothing seemed to matter now; she did not care what might befall her, and in silence she accompanied her mother-in-law home.

'Now, mother, you must leave me; I've some work to finish.'

'I'm sorry, Kate, if——'

'Mother, I've some work to finish; good-night.'

And she sat in the workroom waiting for Mr. Lennox. At last his heavy step was heard on the stairs; then, laying aside the shirt she was making, she stole out to meet him. He saw her as he scraped a match on the wall; dropping it, he put out his hands towards her.

'Is that you, dear?' he said. 'Why didn't you come to the theatre? We had a magnificent house.'

'I couldn't; I met my mother-in-law.'

The red embers of the match that had fallen on the floor now went out, and the indication of their faces was swept away in the darkness.

'Let me get a light, dear.' The intonation of his voice as he said 'dear' caused her an involuntary feeling of voluptuousness. She trembled as the vague outline of his big cheeks became clear in the red flame of the match which he held in his hollowed hands.

'Won't you come in?' she heard him say a moment after.

'No, I couldn't; I must go upstairs in a minute.'

I only came to tell you, for I didn't want you to go away angry; it wasn't my fault. I should so much have liked to have gone to the theatre.'

'It was a pity you didn't come; I was waiting at the door for you. I could have sat by you the whole time.'

Kate's heart died within her at thought of what she had lost, and after a long silence she said very mournfully:

'Perhaps when you come back another time I shall be able to go to the theatre.'

'We've done so well here that we're going to get another date. I'll write and let you know.'

'Will you? And will you come back and lodge here?'

'Of course, and I hope that I shan't be so unlucky the next time as to fall down amid the crockery.'

At this they both laughed, and the conversation came to a pause.

'I must bid you good-night now.'

'But won't you kiss me—just a kiss, so that I may have something to think of?'

'Why do you want to kiss me? You have Miss Leslie to kiss.'

'I never kissed Leslie; that's all nonsense, and I want to kiss you because I love you.'

Kate made no answer, and, following her into the heavy darkness that hung around the foot of the staircase, he took her in his arms. She at first made no resistance, but the passion of his kiss caused her a sudden revolt, and she struggled with him.

'Oh, Mr. Lennox, let me go, I beg of you,' she said,

speaking with her lips close to his. 'Let me go, let me go; they will miss me.'

Possibly fearing another fall, Mr. Lennox loosed his embrace, and she left him.

VII

NEXT morning about eleven the mummer took off his hat in his very largest manner to the ladies, and the bow was so deferential, and seemed to betoken so much respect for the sex, that even Mrs. Ede could not help thinking that Mr. Lennox was very polite. Ralph too was impressed, as well he might be, so attentively did Dick listen to him, just as if nothing in the world concerned him as much as this last attack of asthma, and it was not until Mrs. Ede mentioned that they would be late for church that it occurred to Dick that his chance of catching the eleven o'clock train was growing more and more remote. With a hasty comment on his dilatoriness, he caught up a parcel and rug and shook hands with them all.

The cab rattled away, and Ralph proceeded up the red, silent streets towards the Wesleyan church, walking very slowly between his womankind.

'There's no doubt but that Mr. Lennox is a very nice man,' he said, after they had gone some twenty or thirty paces—'a very nice man indeed; you must admit, mother, that you were wrong.'

'He's polite, if you will,' replied Mrs. Ede, who for the last few minutes had been considering the ungodliness of travelling on a Sunday.

'Don't walk so fast,' Ralph cried.

'Well, then, we shall be late for church!'

'Which, then, is the most important in your eyes—Mr. Peppencott's sermon or my breath?'

'I'm not thinking of Mr. Peppencott's sermon.'

'Then of his voice in the prayer. Lennox may be no better than an actor,' he continued, 'but he's more fellow-feeling than you have. You saw yourself how interested he was in my complaint, and I shall try the cigarettes that used to give his mother relief.' He appealed to Kate, who answered him that it would be as well to try the cigarettes, and her thoughts floated away into a regret that Mr. Lennox had not been able to come to church with them, for she was reckoned to have a good voice. It may have been a memory of Dick that enabled her to pour her voice into the hymn, singing it more lustily than Mrs. Ede ever heard her sing it before. It seemed to Mrs. Ede that only God's grace could enable anyone to sing as Kate was singing, and when the minister began to preach and Kate sat down, her eyes fixed, Mrs. Ede rejoiced. 'The word of God has reached her at last,' she said. 'Never have I seen her listen so intently before to Mr. Peppencott.' Kate sat quite still, almost unconscious of the life around her, remembering that it was on her way from the potteries that she had learnt that there is a life within us deeper and more intense than the life without us. Dick's kisses had angered her at the moment, but in recollection they were inexpressibly dear to her. Her fear had been that time would dim her recollection of them, and her great joy was to discover that this was not so, and that she could recall the intonations of

his voice and the colour of his eyes and the words he spoke to her, reliving them in imagination more intensely than while she was actually in his arms just before that terrible fall or in the shop and frightened lest Mrs. Ede or Ralph should come in and surprise them. But in imagination she was secure from interruption and hindrance, and could taste over and over again the words that he had spoken: 'I shall be back in three months, dear one.'

A great part of her happiness was in the fact that it was all within herself, that none knew of it; had she wished to communicate it, she could not have done so. It was a life within her life, a voice in her heart which she could hear at any moment, and it was a voice so sweet and intense that it could close her ears to her husband and her mother-in-law, who during dinner fell into one of their habitual quarrels.

Ralph, who had not forgotten his mother's lack of sympathy on their way to church, maintained the favourable opinion he had formed of Mr. Lennox. 'It's unchristian,' he said, 'to condemn a man because of the trade or profession he follows,' and somewhat abashed, his mother answered: 'I've always been taught to believe that people who don't go to church lead godless lives.'

Sunday was kept strictly in this family. Three services were attended regularly. Kate hoped to recover the sensations of the morning, and attended church in the afternoon. But the whole place seemed changed. The cold white walls chilled her; the people about her appeared to her in a very small and miserable light, and she was glad to get home. Her thoughts went back to the book she had fallen

asleep over last Sunday night when she sat by her husband's bedside, and when the house was quiet she went upstairs and fetched it. But after reading a few pages the heat of the house seemed to her intolerable. There was no place to go to for a walk except St. John's Road, and there, turning listlessly over the pages of the old novel, the time passed imperceptibly. It was like sitting on the sea-shore; the hills extended like an horizon, and as the sea-dreamer strives to pierce the long illimitable line of the wave and follows the path of the sailing ship, so did Kate gaze out of the sweeping green line that enclosed all she knew of the world, and strove to look beyond into the country to where her friend was going.

Northwood, with its hundreds of sharp roofs and windows, seemed to be dropping into a Sunday doze, under pale salmon-coloured tints, and the bells of its church sounded clearer and clearer at each peal. Warm airs passed over the red roofs of Southwark, and below in the vast hollow of the valley all was still, all seemed abandoned as a desert; no whiff of white steam was blown from the collieries; no black cloud of smoke rolled from the factory chimneys, and they raised their tall stems like a suddenly dismantled forest to a wan, an almost colourless sky. The hills alone maintained their unchangeable aspect.

.VIII

By well-known ways the dog comes back to his kennel, the sheep to the fold, the horse to the stable, and even so did Kate return to her sentimental

self. One day she was turning over the local paper, and suddenly, as if obeying a long-forgotten instinct, her eyes wandered to the poetry column, and again, just as in old time, she was caught by the same simple sentiments of sadness and longing. She found there the usual song, in which *regret* rhymes to *forget*. The same dear questions which used to enchant seven years ago were again asked in the same simple fashion; and they touched her now as they had before. She refound all her old dreams. It seemed as if not a day had passed over her. When she was a girl she used to collect every scrap of love poetry that appeared in the local paper, and paste them into a book, and now, the events of the week having roused her from the lethargy into which she had fallen, she turned for a poem to the *Hanley Courier* as instinctively as an awakened child turns to the breast.

The verses she happened to hit on were after her own heart, and just what were required to complete the transformation of her character :

‘ I love thee, I love thee, how fondly, how well
Let the years that are coming my constancy tell ;
I think of thee daily, my night-thoughts are thine ;
In fairy-like vision thy hand presses mine ;
And even though absent you dwell in my heart ;
Of all that is dear to me, dearest, thou art.’

In reading these lines Kate's heart began to beat quickly, her eyes filled with tears, and wrapped in brightness, like a far distant coast-line, a vision of her girlhood arose. She recalled the emotions she once experienced, the books she had read, and the poetry that was lying upstairs in an old trunk

pushed under the bed. It seemed to her wonderful that it had been forgotten so long; her memory skipped from one fragment to the other, picking up a word here, a phrase there, until a remembrance of her favourite novel seized her; she became the heroine of the absurd fiction, substituting herself for the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley to the gentleman who went to India in despair.

As the fitness of the comparison dawned upon her, she yielded to an ineffable sentiment of weakness: George was the husband's name in the book, she was Helene, and Dick was the lover to whom she could not, would not, give herself, and who on that account had gone away in despair. The coincidence appeared to her as something marvellous, something above nature, and she turned it over, examined it in her mind, as a child would a toy, till, forgetful of her desire to overlook these relics of old times, she went upstairs to the workroom.

The missed visit to the theatre was a favourite theme of conversation between the two women. Kate listened to what went on behind the scenes with greater indulgence, and she seemed to become more accustomed to the idea that Bill and Hender were something more than friends. She was conscious of disloyalty to her own upbringing and to her mother-in-law who loved her, and she often blamed herself and resolved never to allow Hender to speak ill again of Mrs. Ede. But the temptation to complain was insidious. It was not every woman who would consent, as she did, to live under the same roof as her mother-in-law, and Hender, who hated Mrs. Ede, who spoke of her as the 'hag,'

never lost an opportunity of pointing out the fact that the house was Kate's house and not Mrs. Ede's. The first time Hender said, 'After all, the house is yours,' Kate was pleased, but the girl insisted too much, and Kate was often irritated against her assistant, and she often raged inwardly. It was abominable to have her thoughts interpreted by Hender. She loved her mother-in-law dearly, she didn't know what she'd do without her, but—— So it went on; struggle as she would with herself, there still lay at the bottom of her mind the thought that Mrs. Ede had prevented her from going that evening to the theatre, and turn, twist, and wander away as she would, it invariably came back to her.

Frequently Miss Hender had to repeat her questions before she obtained an intelligible answer, and often, without even vouchsafing a reply, Kate would pitch her work aside nervously. Her thoughts were not in her work; she waited impatiently for an opportunity of turning out the old trunk, full of the trinkets, books, verses, remembrances of her youth, which lay under her bed, pushed up against the wall. But a free hour was only possible when Ralph was out. Then her mother-in-law had to mind the shop, and Kate would be sure of privacy at the top of the house.

There was no valid reason why she should dread being found out in so innocent an amusement as turning over a few old papers. Her fear was merely an unreasoned and nervous apprehension of ridicule. Ever since she could remember, her sentimentality was always a subject either of mourning or pity; in allowing it to die out of her heart she had learned

to feel ashamed of it; the idea of being discovered going back to it revolted her, and she did not know which would annoy her the most, her husband's sneers or Mrs. Ede's blank alarm. Kate remembered how she used to be told that novels must be wicked and sinful because there was nothing in them that led the soul to God, and she resolved to avoid further lectures on this subject. She devoted herself to the task of persuading Ralph to leave his counter and to go out for a walk. This was not easy, but she arrived at last at the point of helping him on with his coat and handing him his hat; then conducting him to the door, she bade him not to walk fast and to be sure to keep in the sun. She then went upstairs, her mind relaxed, determined to enjoy herself to the extent of allowing her thoughts for an hour or so to wander at their own sweet will.

The trunk was an oblong box covered with brown hair; to pull it out she had to get under the bed, and it was with trembling and eager fingers that she untied the old twisted cords. Remembrance with Kate was a cult, but her husband's indifference and her mother-in-law's hard, determined opposition had forced the past out of sight; but now on the first encouragement it gushed forth like a suppressed fountain that an incautious hand had suddenly liberated. And with what joy she turned over the old books! She examined the colour of the covers, she read a phrase here and there: they were all so dear to her that she did not know which she loved the best. Scenes, heroes, and heroines long forgotten came back to her, and in what minuteness, and how vividly! It appeared to her that she could not go on

fast enough; her emotion gained upon her until she became quite hysterical; in turning feverishly over some papers a withered pansy floated into her lap. Tears started to her eyes, and she pressed the poor little flower, forgotten so long, to her lips. She could not remember when she gathered it, but it had come to her. Her lips quivered, the light seemed to be growing dark, and a sudden sense of misery eclipsed her happiness, and unable to restrain herself any longer, she burst into a tumultuous storm of sobs.

But after having cried for a few minutes her passion subsided, and she wiped the tears from her hands and face, and, smiling at herself, she continued her search. Everything belonging to that time interested her, verses and faded flowers; but her thoughts were especially centred on an old copybook in which she kept the fragments of poetry that used to strike her fancy at the moment. When she came upon it her heart beat quicker, and with mild sentiments of regret she read through the slips of newspaper; they were all the same, but as long as anyone was spoken of as being the nearest and the dearest Kate was satisfied. Even the bonhom mottoes, of which there were large numbers, drew from her the deepest sighs. The little Cupid firing at a target in the shape of a heart, with 'Tom Smith & Co., London,' printed in small letters underneath, did not prevent her from sharing the sentiment expressed in the lines:

‘ Let this cracker, torn asunder,
Be an emblem of my heart;
And as we have shared the plunder,
Pray you of my love take part.’

Sitting on the floor, with one hand leaning on the open trunk, she read, letting her thoughts drift through past scenes and sensations. All was far away; and she turned over the relics that the past had thrown up on the shore of the present without seeing any connection between them and the needs of the moment until she lit on the following verses

‘ Wearily I’m waiting for you,
For your absence watched in vain
Ask myself the hopeless question,
Will he ever come again ?

‘ All these years, am I forgotten ?
Or in absence are you true ?
Oh, my darling, ’tis so lonely,
Watching, waiting here for you !

‘ Has your heart from its allegiance
Turned to greet a fairer face ?
Have you welcomed in another
Charms you missed in me, and grace ?

‘ Long, long years I have been waiting,
Bearing up against my pain ;
All my thoughts and vows have vanished,
Will they ever come again ?

• ‘ Yes, for woman’s faith ne’er leaves her,
And my trust outweighs my fears ;
And I still will wait his coming,
Though it may not be for years.’

As the deer, when he believes he has eluded the hounds, leaves the burning plains and plunges into the cool woodland water, Kate bathed her tired soul, letting it drink its fill of this very simple poem. The sentiment came to her tenderly, through the weak words; and melting with joy, she repeated them over and over again.

At last her sad face lit up with a smile. It had

example. I wouldn't blame him, for he's my own son, but I'd wish to see him not p'izing so highly the things of the world.'

'We must live, though,' Kate answered, without quite understanding what she said.

'Live—of course we have to live; but it depends how we live and what we live for—whether it be to indulge the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or to regain the image of God, to have the design of God again planted in our souls. This is what we should live for, and it is only thus that we shall find true happiness.'

Though these were memories of phrases heard in the pulpit, they were uttered by Mrs. Ede with a fervour, with a candour of belief, that took from them any appearance of artificiality; and Kate did not notice that her mother-in-law was using words that were not habitual to her.

'But what do you want me to do?' said Kate, who began to feel frightened.

'To go to Christ, to love Him. He is all we have to help us, and they who love Him truly are guided as to how to live righteously. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, it springs from or leads to the love of God and man.'

These words stirred Kate to her very entrails; a sudden gush of feeling brought the tears to her eyes, and she was on the point of throwing herself into Mrs. Ede's arms.

The temptation to have a good cry was almost irresistible, and the burden of her pent-up emotions was more than she could bear. But communing the while rapidly within herself, she hesitated, until an

unexpected turn of thought harshly put it before her that she was being made a fool of—that she had a perfect right to look through her books and poetry, and that Hender's sneers were no more than she deserved for allowing a mother-in-law to bully her. Then the tears of sorrow became those of anger, and striving to speak as rudely as she could, she said :

‘I don't talk about Christ as much as you, but He judges us by our hearts and not by our words. You would do well to humble yourself before you come to preach to others.’

‘Dear Kate, it's because I see you interested in things that have no concern with God's love that I speak to you so. A man who never knows a thought of God has been staying here, and I fear he has led you——’

At these words Kate threw the last papers into the trunk, pushed it away, and turned round fiercely.

‘Led me into what? What do you mean? Mr. Lennox was here because Ralph wished him to be here. I think that you should know better than to say such things. I don't deserve it.’

On this Kate left the room, her face clouded and trembling with a passion that she did not quite feel. To just an appreciable extent she was conscious that it suited her convenience to quarrel with her mother-in-law. She was tired of the life she was leading; her whole heart was in her novels and poetry; and, determined to take in the *London Reader or Journal*, she called back to Mrs. Ede that she was going to consult Ralph on the matter.

He was in capital spirits. The affairs in the shop were going on more satisfactorily than usual, a fact

which he did not fail to attribute to his superior commercial talents. 'A business like theirs went to the bad,' he declared, 'when there wasn't a man to look after it. Women liked being attended to by one of the other sex,' and beaming with artificial smiles, the little man measured out yards of ribbon, and suggested 'that they had a very superior thing in the way of petticoats just come from Manchester.' His health was also much improved, so much so that his asthmatic attack seemed to have done him good. A little colour flushed his cheeks around the edges of the thick beard. In the evenings after supper, when the shop was closed, an hour before they went up to prayers, he would talk of the sales he had made during the day, and speak authoritatively of the possibilities of enlarging the business. His ambition was to find someone in London who would forward them the latest fashions; somebody who would be clever enough to pick out and send them some stylish but simple dress that Kate could copy. He would work the advertisements, and if the articles were well set in the window he would answer for the rest. The great difficulty was, of course, the question of frontage, and Mr. Ede's face grew grave as he thought of his little windows. 'Nothing,' he said, 'can be done without plate-glass; five hundred pounds would buy out the fruit-seller, and throw the whole place into one'; and Kate, interested in all that was imaginative, would raise her eyes from the pages of her book and ask if there was no possibility of realizing this grand future.

She was reading a novel full of the most singular and exciting scenes. In it she discovered a character

